

head of the Abwehr from 1933 to 1944, it should be remembered (and never forgotten) that during the same period, Stalin shot 9 heads of the GRU, two people's commissars of the NKVD, and the generals who were shot simply cannot be counted. The most approximate lists compiled by persons who have not been in any archive show that on the eve of the war (three years) Stalin ordered the execution of 650 generals and admirals. And three times more rotted in the Gulag. Therefore, the opposition to the leader of the peoples was, as we said, different in essence. If Canaris fought the regime, risking his life, then his colleagues in the USSR did the same, saving their lives. And that's a big difference.)

Let's finish with the intelligence people and go back to the end of 1940.

After Hitler, despite all his romanticism, saw the trap into which Stalin pushed him and decided to get even with his Moscow opponent, Canaris was ordered to collect all the necessary information to ensure the coming armed conflict against the USSR. As always and everywhere, the general tasks of the Abwehr were to clarify the available data on the Red Army, the economy, mobilization capabilities, the political situation of the USSR, the mood of the population, as well as to obtain new information: to study the theater of military operations, to prepare reconnaissance and sabotage measures for first operations, to provide covert preparations for the invasion, while simultaneously misinforming the enemy about the true intentions of Germany.

By this time, the Abwehr was already a powerful and widely branched organization capable of solving any problems in almost all regions of the world. And at their side, in the territories of contact with the USSR, the service of Admiral Canaris was guided clearly and confidently.

All information flowed to the Central Department of Colonel Oster, where it was processed and summarized, and then reported to Canaris, who, in turn, reported them in parallel to the headquarters of the OKW and personally to Hitler.

Of course, extensive information was also received from agents in the USSR. Soviet military intelligence and, to a greater extent, the NKVD worked with a large number of double agents, supplying them with disinformation about the state and strength of the Red Army. The disinformation was mainly aimed at downplaying the real forces. However, the vast majority of the twins were exposed by the Abwehr and it was not so difficult to distinguish "misinformation" from real information. Of course, sometimes this did not work out, but such cases were the exception rather than the rule.

Abwehr had other sources of information in the USSR. A secret leak came from the General Staff of the Red Army and from the headquarters of the Air Force, bringing Stalin into understandable fury.

Defectors were a particular source of information. We are very fond of savoring defectors from the Germans and do not write anything about our own, of which there were much more. From January 1940 until the outbreak of war on June 22, 1941, there were 327 such people. We are talking only about military personnel, from the Red Army to the colonel. Many fled, taking with them secret documents and maps. If we add to this the extremely hostile attitude of the population of the Baltic States, Western Ukraine, Belarus and Bessarabia to the Bolshevik regime in general and to the Red Army in particular, then we can say with confidence that the Abwehr did not lack sources of information.

Among other things, extensive documents of Polish intelligence, which had been engaged in developments in the Soviet Union for a long time, fell into the hands of the Germans. The office of Canaris also worked closely with the Hungarian, Italian, Romanian and Bulgarian intelligence services. In general, Finnish intelligence could be considered part of the Abwehr - so much did it interact with the Germans, sharing with Berlin even those data that the Germans did not

requested. And Finnish intelligence was very powerful.

As for Stalin's intentions, few people doubted them. It was enough to look at a map with a diagram of even the approximate deployment of Soviet troops, as their aggressive-offensive orientation became completely obvious.

Throughout 1940, the Abwehr closely watched the movement of Soviet military groups, trying mainly not to miss the moment when this entire gigantic horde received an order to move west. Colonel Lahousen said on this occasion that such an observation was reminiscent of "listening to the ticking of the clockwork of an infernal machine", when you don't know how long the explosive device has been set and you have no way to either defuse it or run away somewhere.

The Abwehr had information that Moscow was waiting for the start of Operation Sea Lion in order to launch an offensive. (Canaris even knew that the prearranged signal "Thunderstorm" transmitted by all means of military communications would be the signal for the offensive). The Germans did not yet know about the operation plan of the same name, but it was clear that if there was a prearranged signal, then there was also an operation plan. And what its exact code name was, was of secondary importance.

It was also quite clear that the expectation of a landing in England would not last indefinitely. Sooner or later, Stalin will realize that he is being led by the nose, and will time the start of the operation to some event, hidden for the time being in the haze of dynamic and unpredictable history.

It was no less clear that if Stalin launched such an offensive, then all the available forces of the Wehrmacht, including all the frail forces of Germany's unreliable allies, would not be enough to stop this offensive. In other words, the inevitable catastrophe became more and more obvious, which could be postponed by some extraordinary means, but could no longer be prevented.

Admiral Canaris was one of those who understood this back in 1940. The past year and four months of the war, although they were marked by great and small triumphs of German weapons, actually completed the process of encircling Germany with an iron ring of implacable enemies. The "garden hose" of President Roosevelt and the issue of "Lend-Lease" raised by him, together with the forthcoming lifting of the "moral embargo" on trade from Russia, quite clearly marked this steel ring.

The admiral and his supporters hated the Hitler regime, but did not at all want to replace this regime with the regime of Stalin's despotism. The encirclement process is being completed, and somewhere in the middle of next year, the process of destroying Germany will begin.

And if all this is inevitable, then at least Germany should be crushed by the West - by England and the USA, and not by Stalin.

Then she and the rest of Europe have a chance to be reborn on the basis of the good old European democracy. The capture of Europe by Stalin can give rise to a cataclysm capable of destroying civilization altogether in the universal sense of the word.

The way out was suggested to Canaris during his next secret trip to Sweden. Hitler must strike at Stalin. He needs to be prompted that this is not only his secret desire, corresponding to the theoretical calculations about the "living space for the German people", so juicy set out in Mein Kampf, but also

the only salvation. The units that Stalin is concentrating on the border are located in such a way that they can be easily destroyed in the course of one decisive operation, launched when tactical surprise is achieved.

This will make it possible to push the Red Army back beyond the Dnieper, and with luck even further. Heavy fighting will involve almost all the forces of the Wehrmacht in this operation, preparing the territory of Europe and Germany for a fairly easy liberation. In the last war, Germany capitulated, occupying vast territories of its opponents: from France to Georgia. In this war, an even more grandiose scenario can be played out, when the Wehrmacht will fight somewhere near Kiev or Smolensk (and, with luck, also near Moscow). Landing on the continent and a new (as in 1918) rapid offensive towards the Franco-German border (Do not forget that these are military studies of the second half of 1940.) will inevitably lead to the fall of the Nazi regime, which will immediately create the prerequisites for peaceful negotiations. Then it will be time to deal with Stalin, whose country, which has been the scene of fierce fighting for about a couple of years, will be bled dry and in need of urgent help. It is impossible to exclude the possibility of the fall of the Stalinist regime, since neither the army nor the people will ever forgive him for the destruction of such large military groups on the border. All together, these events, if they become a reality, will create the prerequisites for a fundamentally new world order based on Christian ideology and civil liberties. The ideology of class and national intolerance, apparently, will go further east to the countries of Asia.

The question arose: what if the Russians did not fight, but began to surrender. There were plenty of such examples even during the war with Finland.

If this happens at the first stage, then it's okay. Even opposite. This will allow the Wehrmacht to go as far as possible into Russian territory. As we advance, the German lines of communication will stretch dangerously, and the very configuration of the European part of the USSR in the form of a funnel expanding to the east will inevitably lead to a slowdown in movement, a severing of ties between various units and, as a result, to a stop. In addition, it is very easy for Hitler and his party and SS pack to be pushed to carry out a series of measures against the local population, which will increase the level of resistance of the armed forces and possibly lead to a people's war in the rear of the Wehrmacht, which will increase bitterness on both sides.

Therefore, the main thing is to prepare for a possible infliction of a sudden stunning blow on the Russians.

This is the only chance to save Europe and Germany from final destruction.

It is easy to say - to inflict a sudden stunning blow on the Red Army. The whole plan is suspended on the thinnest invisible hairs, the breakage of each one can lead to the collapse of the whole plan and to a catastrophe. It is simply impossible to quietly deploy along the borders of a potential enemy (and even almost three times stronger than yourself) a multi-million army, so much so that no one notices this. And you should not try to do this - nothing will work, not even taking into account the fact how global and all-pervasive Stalinist intelligence is. Although she has so far taken great pleasure in swallowing disinformation, no one knows how much longer she intends to do this and what happens to this disinformation after she digests it?

There was still a problem that needed to be solved "with the greatest possible delicacy," as Canaris once put it in a conversation with Oster.

Hitler understood more and more clearly every day that he simply had no other choice but to attack the USSR. Unlike military professionals, the Fuhrer, sincerely believing that Providence itself was on his side, not only believed in the success of such an attack, but even in the final victory in the outbreak of war. The numbers mean absolutely nothing, he assured the generals in conversations, the number of tanks and planes does not decide anything. They are powerless against the will of the almighty Rock, which predetermined the role of Germany and its people

for many millennia to come.

Such moods of Hitler were quite consistent with the global plans of the "new world order", however, Canaris and his subordinates, horrified by intelligence reports coming from the east, with good reason feared that the summary data on the size of the Soviet armed forces and on the number of various types of forces in these forces military equipment will horrify the Fuhrer, forcing him to forget about the benevolence of Providence.

The scouts were afraid that, having received accurate data on the strength and weapons of the Red Army, Hitler would not dare to attack Stalin, would begin to draw him into negotiations, lose precious time and, as a result, frustrate an already very shaky plan, destroying himself, Germany and Europe.

To prevent this from happening, it was decided not to "bring" to Hitler and the headquarters of the high command the true data on the number of weapons that Stalin had forged, preparing a surprise for his gullible Berlin friend. Hitler's habit of falling into noisy tantrums on any insignificant occasion was already well known to those who dealt with him on a regular basis.

It was all the more easy to do this because the disinformation presented by the Abwehr, in general terms, was quite consistent with the disinformation spread by Soviet intelligence, which was making titanic efforts to hide preparations for the Thunderstorm from Germany.

Having accumulated mountains of data on the state of the Red Army, having studied tens of thousands of documents, including the testimonies of defectors from Soviet intelligence and the army, and having analyzed a myriad of aerial photographic data, by the end of 1940 the Abwehr knew almost everything - both about the current state of the Soviet armed forces and about the potential taking into account the fact that after Hitler's attack, the USSR automatically becomes an ally of England, and consequently of the United States.

Thus, attacking the USSR, Hitler automatically closes the circle of encirclement against him, cuts off Germany from the sources of generous Soviet supplies and finds himself in a completely hopeless situation. Therefore, the three departments of the Abwehr (including, of course, the Central) feverishly falsified the data, presenting them to Hitler as the results of the most thorough analysis.

Canaris repeatedly had to make messages and reports in the presence of Hitler, and he studied well the reaction of the Fuhrer to various specific information about the level of combat readiness and strength of the Red Army.

In August 1940, the admiral presented the following summary to Hitler:

"Russia has a total of 151 infantry divisions, 32 cavalry divisions, 38 motorized mechanized brigades. Until spring, this number can not increase significantly.

Moreover, it is directly possible to deploy 96 infantry, 23 cavalry divisions, 28 motorized mechanized brigades against Germany.

The presentation of such disinformation to Hitler was not clearly consistent with the data presented to Hitler by Halder and Jodl, and, of course, with the information that came through the service of Heydrich and the Foreign Ministry.

It was very easy to accuse the latter of complete incompetence, and the generals who warned Hitler that all the numerical data on the weapons of the Red Army were greatly underestimated were either accused of superficial data analysis or declared alarmists.

Hitler always leaned in favor of Canaris' data, because he did not want to believe in "absolutely fantastic figures" about the amount of military equipment pulled together by Stalin to the border. The Fuhrer later admits (after the start of the war) that the amount of Russian weapons (abandoned by the Red Army during the retreat and captured by the Germans) turned out to be "the greatest surprise" for him.

Moreover, carrying out the planned plan, Canaris artificially limited the reported information only to the depth of the planned first strategic operation and, providing extensive data on the number of formations of the Red Army, on the deployment of its troops and headquarters, etc., convincing Hitler and the generals from his entourage (even Jodl) that a victory over the first strategic echelon of the Red Army (and Stalin already had two of them and a third was being formed) would mean victory over the Soviet Union.

However, Hitler, for reasons known only to him alone, was skeptical even of the figures presented to him by Canaris, considering them to be exaggerated. He retained this habit throughout the war, having already quite a lot of experience and no less number of "greatest surprises" about the Stalinist assembly line that produces soldiers and weapons.

At the headquarters games at the headquarters of the Wehrmacht High Command, held at the end of November 1940 under the leadership of General Paulus, Canaris presented slightly modified data on the composition of the Red Army, which then formed the basis of the Barbarossa plan.

A similar calculation, adopted both for the game and for further strategic planning, provided that 125 rifle divisions and 50 tank and motorized mechanized brigades would be put up against Germany. The games were based on "Special superiority of the Germans in artillery, including means of artillery observation, in tanks and communications."

The "decisive superiority in aviation" was especially emphasized. (All this is funny, given that the Germans were inferior to the Red Army in terms of tanks in a ratio of 1: 5, in aircraft - 1: 6.7, in artillery - 1: 8, indeed surpassing the Red Army only in communications, then the question arises: how could such an experienced intelligence service as the Abwehr make such a miscalculation? Not a single intelligence service in the world, even the most inexperienced, has ever made miscalculations by more than 1.5 - rarely 2 times. And here 5-8 times! At the beginning of the war, the Abwehr, as if by magic, began to give absolutely accurate data about the enemy.

But these data were already such that Hitler simply did not want to listen to them.

Field Marshal Manstein recalls in this regard: "Digital data on enemy formations were derived from the sum of all intelligence data. The latter almost always (including near Stalingrad) turned out to be correct, and not exaggerated, as Hitler claimed. Hitler's pre-war processing of notorious disinformation led to the fact that during the war he no longer believed the completely accurate data collected and processed by intelligence. True, we must give the Fuhrer his due, he did not believe the Gestapo data either, that with the outbreak of war, intelligence, discarding all decency, began to openly work for the enemy

On December 18, when Hitler promised to finally review the Otto plan and approve it as a directive, Canaris arrived at the meeting with a prepared report, which was entitled: "The wartime armed forces of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) as of January 1, 1941 ".

Later (January 15, 1941), this document will be published by the High Command of the Ground Forces in a circulation of 2 thousand copies and sent to all command and staff authorities of the Wehrmacht, becoming the basis of all German strategic calculations.

The forces of the Red Army were defined as 150 rifle divisions, 32-36 cavalry divisions, 6 motorized mechanized corps and 36 motorized mechanized brigades. The size of the peacetime army - in 2 million people.

The largest number of fielded divisions was estimated at 209, the number of motorized mechanized brigades - 36.

The number of aircraft was determined at 4,000, the number of tanks at about 3,700 (only in the western regions there were 18,000 and 14,000 units, respectively). Commenting on this document, Soviet official history notes:

"The Hitlerite military leadership believed that the Soviet Union was able to field 209 divisions during general mobilization, in other words, add 59 divisions to the already existing ones. In fact, in the summer of 1941 alone, the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command of the Red Army sent more than 324 divisions to the front.

If this figure is added to the 306 divisions formed before the war (the officially recognized figure), then the forces with which Stalin was going to reach the Atlantic become approximately clear: approximately 650 divisions in four strategic echelons.

This figure roughly corresponds to the number of divisions that the Wehrmacht managed to grind in the period from 1941 to the end of 1942.

Returning to the activities of Canaris, it is appropriate to quote a document found during a search in the safe of Colonel Auster:

"Top secret". "Astra" - Abverstelle - "Poznan" - Center.

More than 250 divisions, 17 thousand tanks and 15 thousand aircraft, more than 40 thousand artillery pieces are concentrated on the borders of the Reich. The military districts were transformed into fronts. Troops at / blown off only a signal for the offensive, which can follow at any moment. Aster. Adopted March 11, 1941. 23:42.

On the visa document of Canaris and Auster.

The radiogram was not reported to anyone.

Let's go back to 1940 again.

Hitler silently listened to the calculations of Canaris. Otto's plan, formatted as Directive 21, lay on the table in front of him.

Traveling endlessly from the General Staff to the Design Bureau and back, the plan finally received an edition that everyone would like to consider final, although the vast experience of the past told everyone gathered that this was not so. Life itself will bring into the plan numerous

adjustments that are currently unforeseen.

After listening to the head of military intelligence and Halder's remark that it was better not to set a specific date for the attack, but to tie it to the most favorable moment, taking into account the political situation, weather and other things, Hitler broke his silence and announced that he had decided to give this operation the code name "Barbarossa", causing some excitement among those present.

Everyone knew some weakness of Hitler - a great lover and connoisseur of German history - to the German Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa, the first and most prominent representative of the Hohenstaufen dynasty, who reigned from 1152 to 1190.

His reign was marked by the desire to create a united Europe and was marked by so many significant events that German folklore made Frederick the hero of numerous legends and tales, attributing almost all the remarkable events of the Middle Ages to the personality of this emperor.

Confused by something else. Everyone knew that in 1189, the sixty-seven-year-old emperor, in the name of uniting Europe mired in strife, tired of the endless betrayals of the Italian provinces and Rome, conceived a crusade to liberate Jerusalem from Sultan Saladin, who had captured the holy city.

Having personally led the campaign, Frederick fought his way through the territory of Byzantium, defeating the troops of Emperor Isaac Angel, landed in Asia Minor, where he drowned, crossing the small river Salefu on June 10, 1190. That was the end of the trip. But no one dared to remind Hitler of this. If the Führer wants the plan to be called Barbarossa, let it be Barbarossa. The main thing is not this. The whole point of the plan is to strike Stalin first before he strikes us. In this respect the plan left no doubt.

Directive No. 21

PLAN "BARBAROSSA"

Fuhrer and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces.

Supreme Command of the Armed Forces.

Operations headquarters.

Department of National Defense.

No. 33408/40

Fuhrer's Headquarters

December 18, 1940

9 copies.

Ex. No. 1.

Top secret. For command only.

The German armed forces must be ready to defeat Soviet Russia in a short campaign even before the war against England is over (Option

Barbarossa...

Having skimmed over the document with his eyes, Hitler put his signature and, without even honoring those present with a word, left the room.

Everything happened so dull and mundane that General Halder did not even note this event in his famous diary.

Chapter 11

December in Moscow passed to the accompaniment of noisy holidays.

Newspapers noted that if in 1938 the population of the Soviet Union was 169 million people, in 1939 - 183 million people, then in 1940 it already amounted to 193 million, since the Baltic republics joined the USSR, and Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina were liberated from the "yoke Romanian boyars.

Then elections were held in the newly formed Karelian-Finnish SSR, as well as in Western Ukraine and Western Belarus, whose territories had already been more or less cleared of "dangerous social elements" by this time.

The press reported rather sparingly on world affairs, being almost completely filled with reports on popular enthusiasm in connection with the next anniversary of the Cheka-NKVD on December 20 and, of course, on December 21, it was full of congratulations on the next birthday of Comrade Stalin, who turned 61 years old.

On December 20, Stalin requested Timoshenko and Meretskov to come and demanded from them an analysis of the military situation in the world, as well as a report on readiness for a military conference and strategic staff games, which were to begin on December 23. The military seized the opportunity and delivered to Stalin for review the lists of "the highest commanding staff involved in the operational-strategic game, with distribution by roles." The lists were compiled separately for the "East" and "Western" sides of the games, which were respectively to be led by Colonel General of the Tank Forces Pavlov and Army General Zhukov, along with about fifty senior officers of various ranks and positions.

After reviewing the lists, Meretskov made a brief presentation. Never since the beginning of the second imperialist war in Europe (this definition, coined in the department of agitation and propaganda of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks, became more and more fashionable and pleased the leader), did the Germans find themselves in such an unbalanced position. On the one hand, they are forced to keep 93-95 divisions on the south coast of the English Channel in readiness for the invasion of the British Isles, which will undoubtedly happen next summer, but, on the other hand, with the current operational inactivity of these troops on the canal, Hitler is increasingly feeling lack of forces in other directions. The British, realizing this, are expanding the theater of operations in those regions, the defense of which Hitler recklessly entrusted to his Italian allies. Over the Italian army in Africa and Greece, despite its numerical and material superiority over the combined Anglo-Greek units, there is already a very real threat of disaster, which is inevitable if the Germans do not provide their unlucky allies with quick and direct assistance.

In this regard, the question becomes very interesting: where will Hitler remove the troops - from the canal or from our border? If he withdraws from the canal, then he again refuses to disembark. On the Canal, 94 divisions are the bare minimum needed to carry out a successful landing on the south coast of England, where 52 British divisions are waiting for Hitler. If he removes from our border, then this will be another confirmation of the secondary importance of the eastern direction and the need to keep troops in Poland only for their recruitment and training at a relative distance from the main theaters of military operations and beyond the reach of enemy aircraft.

If the transfer of troops to Greece from the territories of former Poland and former Czechoslovakia begins, then the accumulation of these units in Romania and Bulgaria, and, possibly, in Yugoslavia, is inevitable, which will expose these units in a state on the march under the flank attack of our troops, creating an environment for them rapid encirclement and destruction.

On the eve of the planned strategic games, from December 23 to 31, a meeting of the top leadership of the Red Army was scheduled, at which the commander of the Kiev Special Military District, General of the Army Zhukov, who had recently become a deputy of the Supreme Council, was to make the main report. The topic of his report was "The nature of the modern offensive operation."

The general, based on his own recent experience of the battles at Khalkhin Gol and on the year-long experience of the "second imperialist war" in Europe, had to outline the scheme for future actions of all branches of the Armed Forces within the framework of the national strategy - "little bloodshed on foreign territory."

Stalin liked Zhukov's determination, ruthlessness and energy, liked his temper and rudeness, the ease with which the commander put his subordinates against the wall for the slightest misses in service, liked his peasant-proletarian origin. I also liked the fact that Zhukov was not an officer (even a junior one) during the First World War, was not Trotsky's nominee during the Civil War, almost all of it was "cut off by an ordinary and junior commander" and that he took place under the wing of Semyon Budyonny in the last invented cavalry general headquarters.

Stalin chose Zhukov precisely because, with the sixth sense of an experienced administrator, he saw in him exactly the person who, possessing almost the same concentration of bestial energy, will and cruelty as he himself, is essentially the only person who could carry out Operation Thunderstorm "exactly as Stalin intended it - to ride across Europe with a powerful steam roller, regardless of either one's own or other people's losses, driving troops forward with their inhuman energy through the mountains of their own and other people's corpses.

It was clear to Stalin and many people from his entourage that the country, whose only ideology was the incessant (as Lenin bequeathed) terror, lives, if we discard all the propaganda husks, in a state of constantly escalating internal political crisis. In the 20 years that have passed since the end of the civil war, this crisis has shaken and contorted the country with seizures reminiscent of epileptic seizures without a moment's respite.

Stalin conceived the "Thunderstorm" not only because it fully corresponded to his ambitious plans to prove the correctness of Lenin's prophecies of spreading communist ideology throughout the world and thereby achieving world domination, but also because the war and the world crisis that preceded it were seen by him as the only way out. from an internal crisis.

The main task that Dekanozov received when going to Berlin was not only and not

as much intelligence of Hitler's intentions regarding the Soviet Union as observation of the intrigues of the British in the sphere of Soviet-German relations. Soviet agents in England, consisting of clever disinformers, who later received the nickname of the "Magnificent Five from Cambridge", anxiously reported to Moscow that a conspiracy was weaving in the depths of British intelligence and the English "ruling class", the purpose of which was to set Germany against the Soviet Union, and of the Soviet Union against Germany by spreading disinformation, falsification and outright lies.

They are already bombarding our agents all over the world with their misinformation, confusing analysts in the NKVD and the GRU. General Golikov reassured the leader: his people were experienced enough to distinguish information from disinformation. The British will never succeed in realizing their nefarious plans!

Golikov knew better than anyone how successful the British "conspirators" had been in penetrating the holy of holies of the GRU - the central information department, the head of which, Lieutenant Colonel Novobranets, appeared before him every day with a report on the constant increase in German divisions on the border with the USSR. The agents of Lieutenant Colonel Rookie, operating in the border deployment zone of a potential enemy, constantly reported an increase in the number of German troops.

Messages coming from different, unrelated sources were already plausible, if only because they did not contradict each other. But the Recruit's subordinates did not take them blindly on faith. They checked and double-checked the information received, carefully recording all the data and taking each division into account. They registered the number of the division, its organization and combat strength. The division's commander and senior officers were listed on the division's record card. They found out their characters and tastes: who has a craving for alcohol, who - for cards, who - for women, and who - for the whole "bouquet" of simple officer entertainment. The amount of such data left no doubt about their reliability. With regularity, once a month, lieutenant colonel Novobranets issued an intelligence report under his signature for distribution according to the approved order: to all members of the Politburo and the government, the General Staff, central military institutions, headquarters of military districts and troops - up to and including the headquarters of the corps. The head of the GRU, General Golikov, approved such a report.

In addition to the usual intelligence reports, the Recruit Department issued, with much greater frequency, the so-called "Special Messages" labeled "Top Secret. of particular importance." These "special messages" were signed by Golikov himself and distributed according to a list approved by Stalin. The list included Stalin himself, Molotov, Malenkov, Beria, Timoshenko, Meretskov, and later Zhukov.

In addition to intelligence information, the GRU received a variety of data from rumors to anonymous letters from all over the world. One of these letters, signed with the words "Your friend", General Golikov handed over to the Rookie after the next report and ordered him to report his opinion. The rookie carefully studied the letter, written in small, compact handwriting on several sheets of a student's notebook. Anonymous wrote about the inevitability of a German attack on the USSR, arguing that Stalin made a big mistake by interrupting negotiations with Anglo-French representatives and concluding a non-aggression pact and a friendship treaty with Germany. The author of the letter characterized this pact as a false diplomatic step and called on the Soviet Union to be vigilant and ready: Hitler had already ordered the transfer of troops to the East and any delay on the part of the Soviet Union was mortally dangerous.

The next day, Golikov asked the lieutenant colonel what he thought of the letter. The recruit replied that he fully shared the anonymous opinion and advised to send a letter to Stalin as a "special message".

Golikov was clearly dissatisfied with the answer of his subordinate and, wishing to direct the lieutenant colonel on the "true path", exclaimed:

- Yes, what are you? Do you understand what you are saying? After all, he wants to push our foreheads against Germany? The Germans are going to strike at England, to cross the English Channel. If we act as this "friend" advises, we will only frighten the Germans by our actions and provoke them against us. So does the owner.

Stalin was called "the master", and the lieutenant colonel realized that this letter had already been with Stalin before him and that General Golikov was expressing not his own, but his point of view. The recruit began to understand the horror of the situation. Stalin and his entourage live in some kind of illusory world, detached from reality. They do not even want to hear about the true situation, if it contradicts some of their incomprehensible calculations. However, the brave lieutenant colonel, knowing full well that he was risking his head, decided not to give up, hoping to convince at least his own command.

On the eve of the beginning of the all-army meeting and strategic games, Golikov ordered the Rookie to prepare the so-called "mob note" on Germany to determine the possible scale of the deployment of the German army in an attack on the USSR. Using his data, Rookie prepared two options for deploying the enemy: for a lightning war (blitzkrieg) and for a long one, determining the number of divisions, respectively: 220 and 230. A map was attached to the note, which showed the existing groupings of German troops on the Soviet borders and their possible course of action.

Having finished the work, the lieutenant colonel presented the "note" to Golikov.

He looked at the diagram for a long time, with obvious interest. Then he put the papers aside and said to the Rookie: "Your reasoning is correct, but it is only speculation. In reality, these groups do not exist.

Lieutenant Colonel Rookie was well aware of the command's plan: to wait for the Germans to invade England and strike them from the rear. The plan was good, but if the Germans really did not suspect anything, then the number of German divisions on our borders should have been steadily decreasing, but this number was increasing with alarming constancy. So the Germans know our plan and they, fooling us, are going to inflict a crushing blow on us? Why else would they build up their strength?

The explanation that the second echelon of the invasion of England was being formed on the eastern borders of Germany, far from the influence and prying eyes of enemy aircraft, also did not suit Lieutenant Colonel Rookie. The location of the units is such that they are clearly aiming for an invasion, and are not engaged in formation, preparing for a campaign to the other end of Europe. If we are now, i.e. at the end of December 1940, we will move our armies to the west, then we will already find ourselves in a stupid situation, since we will run into 110 divisions, of which 11 are tank divisions. As a result, instead of a relatively easy breakthrough to Europe, we will get stuck in battles that still don't know how and will end.

If we continue to sit and wait for the landing in England, as the Germans are trying to convince us all the time, then in the end we will fall under such a blow from them, from which it will be very difficult to recover. However, no arguments worked against Golikov. Of all the Rookie reports, the head of the GRU removed about a third of the German divisions, reducing their number to 72.

Finally, the Rookie could not stand it and bluntly declared to his superior:

- Comrade General, I do not agree with your practice of "cutting off" the number of divisions that

we indicate. The time has already come for the next report on Germany, and I cannot release it with distorted data.

Golikov silently took a sheet of Alexandrian paper from the safe, unfolded it on the table and said: "Here, Lieutenant Colonel, is the actual situation on our borders. Take a look and stop panicking!"

The recruit glanced at the diagram, where the blue icons marked the German divisions deployed along the Soviet borders, and inquired about the source of this information.

"This scheme," Golikov explained, "was handed over to us by the Yugoslav military attaché, Colonel Putnik. The "boss" also considers these data absolutely correct.

Having sat down to study the scheme of Colonel Putnik, Lieutenant Colonel Rookie drew attention to the fact that the number of divisions on it was greatly reduced and they were located on the border without any idea. This is how troops are actually deployed, pulled into some area for the purpose of reorganization. However, the numbering of the divisions coincided with the data that were available in the old reports compiled by the Recruit's department.

The lieutenant colonel had no doubts that this was a German disinformation, but he realized with horror that his top secret reports were falling into the hands of the Germans and that most of the agents, who were accustomed to consider absolutely reliable, were in fact engaged in disinformation. Moreover, it became clear to him that disinformation is being very cleverly conveyed through our own intelligence and government channels. It was characteristic that the disinformation material did not get to the GRU from the so-called "own" sources, but came from above. Moreover, the path of the "disinformation" was very original: at first she got into the foreign department of the NKVD or to the "neighbors", as the GRU liked to put it, penetrating into the NKVD and counterintelligence agent network. Then, with the help of Beria, who was a member of the Politburo, disinformation got to Stalin and already from Stalin came to the GRU, where it was no longer possible to ignore it.

(In his memoirs, the late Colonel Novobranets writes: "We must pay tribute to the German intelligence: with its disinformation, it managed to deftly deceive our government, hide military preparations against us from it. The employees of the Intelligence Agency concentrated the fight against disinformation primarily around the number of enemy divisions. We showed their true quantity, and German intelligence tried in every possible way to hide it or reduce: in addition, we were assured that Germany would strike at England and thereby expose her rear to our blow. In this struggle, German intelligence defeated us. The Soviet government and military leadership believed enemy disinformation, not their own intelligence. Even the head of the Intelligence Department himself did not believe her, and systematically, every week, more and more "cut off" the number of German divisions, adjusting our intelligence to Putnik's message. In the memoirs of Marshal Zhukov, it is said that on April 4, 1941 (!) According to the General Staff, there were 72-73 divisions against the USSR. This is the Traveler's data. As early as December 1940, our military intelligence reported in Intelligence Report No. 8 that 110 divisions were concentrated against the USSR, of which 11 were tank divisions. How did it happen that as of April 1941 there were 73 of them? 38 divisions less?! This is the work of the head of the Intelligence Directorate, General Golikov. He simply removed 38 divisions from the register and slipped Colonel Putnik's misinformation to the General Staff. On the layout of the German troops on our borders, given in the book of Marshal Zhukov ... I recognize the scheme of the Wayfarer.

Having studied Putnik's scheme and made a copy of it, the Rookie returned it to Golikov, firmly stating that it was pure disinformation. He also expressed his opinion in the form of an official report.

Demonstrating super-patience, General Golikov tried to convince his stubborn subordinate. Expanding again the diagram of the Yugoslav double agent, Golikov began to explain to the Rookie how everything in this diagram looks logical and plausible. The main forces of Germany, as proved by many reports from various sources, are in northern France and are preparing to deliver a decisive blow to England. There's all sorts of evidence here.

All this is the legacy of the exposed enemy of the people, General Proskurov, who, when he was the head of the GRU, inspired all his subordinates that the Sea Lion operation was impossible in principle and did not want to reckon with any other until his arrest.

opinions.

Objections at meetings rained down. Why do the Germans continue such costly raids on Britain, constantly increasing the power of their strikes and incurring corresponding losses in materiel and people? With figures in hand, Rookie tried to prove that, on the contrary, the intensity of the fighting over England was declining. It's just that both sides make more propaganda noise about this, significantly increasing in their reports both the forces involved and the losses, both their own and the enemy's. In reality, the British are withdrawing troops from the mother country, transferring them in whole divisions to the Mediterranean and North Africa. Would they have done so if their islands were in real danger?

The British did not remove divisions from the islands of the metropolis, objected to him, but brought them from the dominions: Australia, New Zealand and Canada, as well as from India. Their intentions are clear. In this way, they first of all want to pull off a certain number of German units from the English Channel. Lieutenant Colonel Rookie should be no worse than others who have access to top-secret intelligence information, he knows the latest reports from Comrade Kim Philby (and not him alone) about what kind of panic in anticipation of a German invasion now reigns in the British Isles, which was not even in the summer and in early autumn of this year.

The royal family, the government, the leaders of major political parties, the bigwigs of the City and many others are ready for an urgent evacuation to Canada. In the mountains of Scotland, preparations are underway for guerrilla warfare. Interesting documents fell into the hands of our intelligence about the destruction by the British of their own naval bases in the event of a German invasion and about the evacuation of the formations of the metropolitan fleet to the bases of dominions and colonies. A list of ships and ships that should be blown up to block ports and bases is given.

Is this all done for some kind of misinformation?

Why should the British misinform us in any way? If they are trying to pit the USSR and Germany against each other, then these are clearly not the right methods.

From this only one thing is clear, the recruit insisted, that the British, like the Germans, are also interested in us believing in the possibility of a German invasion of their islands. This is quite logical - they do not want our campaign in Europe at all and they want to give the initiative to Hitler in the upcoming clash with the USSR. Therefore, despite the war, their special services work in the same direction, although with different goals. For the British, Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union is not only the most real way to salvation, but also the opportunity to finally lock Germany into a circle of irreconcilable opponents. For Hitler, let's not kid ourselves, this is the only way to prolong his own existence.

Opponents agreed that there was a certain logic in Rookie's reasoning. (The words of the Rookie that his reasoning is not based on logic at all, but on reliable

information, no one heard.) But, the opponents continued, Hitler, mindful of the past, would never dare to fight on two fronts. And for all the facts cited by the Rookie in a boring enumeration of divisions and their locations, there are a lot of facts proving that his point of view is erroneous.

Relatively recently, the "neighbors" (i.e., NKVD intelligence) obtained a curious document signed by the chief of the Nazi security service, SS Obergruppenführer Heydrich. This is the action plan of the Gestapo and other German punitive organs in the occupied territories of the British Isles. The plan is so carefully crafted that it is hard to imagine that such pedantic Germans would take the time of agencies such as their own security service in compiling such detailed documents only for the purpose of misleading the Soviet side.

And finally, almost a day later, the Germans send reconnaissance and sabotage parties to the coast of southern England, sometimes by force up to a platoon, in order to reconnoitre specific landing sites, terrain, enemy forces, and the like. As a rule, these groups either die or are captured. Is this also for misinformation?

The recruit replied that Heydrich's office was precisely the place where all the "disinformation" was forged. He personally would not have believed a single document emanating from the Nazi security service.

As for the death of German sabotage groups on the coast, Rookie argued, for the sake of global disinformation, you can sacrifice much more than a few dozen soldiers and pilots.

The time was approaching for a secret meeting of the senior command staff of the Red Army and the strategic games finalizing the development of the Thunderstorm, and long and painful discussions were still going on in the GRU about how many German divisions were on the borders of eastern Poland and East Prussia and where Hitler was still aiming the next blow - to England or the USSR?

Another report on Germany, which the Rookie received to prepare for the start of the games, was still not compiled. The lieutenant colonel, realizing what he was risking, began to hesitate. A cowardly thought crept up: to do as the authorities ordered. However, like all the few honest middle-ranking people, brought up in the grip of totalitarianism with their sincere belief in the holy infallibility of the leader, Lieutenant Colonel Rookie came to a firm conviction: the enemies who have penetrated to the very top of the party and state leadership are deceiving Comrade Stalin, not giving him the opportunity learn about the true situation and make the necessary decisions. That is why the courageous and stubborn officer eventually decided to go practically to suicide, but to convey the truthful information to the leader, risking "disappearing without a trace" at the same time, as his former boss, General Proskurov, disappeared.

After another report to Golikov, when the head of the GRU, in addition to the previous ones, "cut off" another 15 German divisions, the lieutenant colonel decided to act independently. Ordering his deputy to prepare all the necessary materials and data collected by the information department, the Rookie began to draw up a summary, which took a little more than a day. It was report No. 8 for December 1940. It said:

"Recently, mass transfers of German troops to our borders have been noted. These transfers are carefully camouflaged and hidden. As of December 1940, about one hundred and ten divisions were concentrated on our borders, of which eleven were tank divisions. The very arrangement of these compounds leaves no doubt that they are aimed at

intrusion into our territory..."

The diagram attached to the report showed all the German troops - up to the division and a separate unit. In the conclusions, it was written that such a huge number of troops was concentrated not to improve quartering conditions, as Hitler stated and German diplomats repeated, but for the war against the USSR.

To begin with, the Rookie showed this summary to his friend and classmate after graduating from the Academy. Frunze to Major General Rybalko, who also served in the GRU at that time. Comparing the scheme drawn up by the Rookie with the scheme of the Yugoslav colonel, Rybalko immediately understood the position in which the head of the information department had fallen.

Rybalko, knowing the exceptional decency of the Rookie, took the opportunity to express his own thoughts, which had been boiling over lately. What's going on in the army? At Khalkhin Gol and in Finland they disgraced the whole world. The army is commanded by illiterate people - squadron commanders, sergeants without education and experience. And hundreds of educated officers who graduated from academies sit for years in headquarters in secondary positions. There is some reverse natural selection going on. Everything possible is being done to disgrace the army again to the whole world in the next war.

After a conversation with Rybalko, the Rookie's decision to complete the job became firm, although he still did not see a way to get around his immediate superiors,

According to existing practice, all information documents of the GRU, including reports, were compiled and signed by the head of the information department. The signal copy, as already noted, was to be reported to Golikov and only after its approval was sent to the troops and to those persons who were included in the "special assignment".

The recruit decided to send a report to the troops without the knowledge of General Golikov, which in itself was a completely unprecedented case. But, according to the lieutenant colonel, there was no other way out. Calling the head of the printing house, Novobranets handed him a summary, ordered it to be urgently printed, and an advance copy to be delivered to him, allegedly for a report to Golikov. Having received a message that the report was ready, the Rookie ordered that the circulation be handed over to the expedition for distribution, and the received signal copy was locked in his safe. Then he called the head of the expedition and asked him to send the report to the troops as soon as possible, recommending that the report be sent to Moscow addresses as a last resort. In Moscow, they say, they will always have time to get it. Soon, confirmations about the receipt of the report began to arrive from the district headquarters.

Now the most difficult thing lay ahead: to report the signal copy to Golikov retroactively. Anticipating "many bad moments," Rookie entered the GRU chief's office and silently placed the report on the table in front of him. Golikov leafed through the brochure and began to examine the diagram. The face of General Golikov first expressed surprise, then bewilderment, and then Golikov threw the report away and slammed his fist on the table. For the always level-headed general, this was a display of extreme anger. Pulling himself together, Golikov asked the Rookie if he had received from someone the task of provoking a war with Germany? What does he achieve by raising such a panic? Can the Rookie answer him articulately?

The lieutenant colonel, also trying to control himself, said that the main duty of intelligence is not only to supply its command with real information and, if possible, not participate in its disinformation, but also, if necessary, to suggest the command the right decision.

So, he believes that if we expect that in connection with the operation "Sea Lion" the Germans will begin

expose our border and we can easily carry out the planned operation, then we can not count on all this. The Germans are not going to transfer troops anywhere from our borders, but, on the contrary, they are constantly reinforcing them. It follows from this that they know our plans and, of course, they are not going to follow them. And it follows from this that we, in turn, should not wait any longer, and right now, when we still have almost a double superiority over the Germans, while they have not yet reached our border along its entire length, while the sources of Romanian oil are still not well defended, strike first, staging several frontier incidents that can be represented as a German attack.

Listening to his subordinate, General Golikov did not utter a word, and then returned the report to him, saying that he did not intend to approve such a document, forbade it to be sent to the troops and ordered that the entire circulation be destroyed.

Then, in an even and quiet voice, the Rookie reported that the report had already been sent to the troops.

It was too much even for the cold-blooded Golikov.

The general announced the removal of the lieutenant colonel from his post and putting him on trial for repeated attempts to misinform the command, using official position.

However, Lieutenant Colonel Rookie was ready for just such a development of events. Asking not to yell at himself, he stated that Gogov, as the head of the information department, was responsible for his head report, and since his views differed so much from the views of General Golikov, he asked to be given the opportunity to personally report to the Chief of the General Staff. If such an opportunity is not given to him, he will find his own way out directly to Army General Meretskov.

All right, Golikov agreed, I'll arrange a personal report for you. Just don't regret it later.

Returning to his department, the Rookie wrote a detailed report addressed to the Chief of the General Staff, then prepared a "special message" to Stalin, Molotov, Malenkov, Timoshenko and Beria, where he gave a detailed description of the threat looming over the country and attached "summary No. 8".

He was already finishing his work when the head of the Academy of the General Staff, Lieutenant General Mordvinov, called, asking if the matter was really as serious as it was written in the summary.

Even more seriously, the Rookie confirmed.

Our forces The rookie knew, but he remarked to the general that in these times, with a powerful surprise strike, any number of people and equipment can be mixed with any amount of land. Do not forget that our troops do not have any plan for the retreat, which is forbidden even to mention. If they are forced to retreat with the first sudden blow, then such a mass of troops and military equipment that we have on the western borders will immediately cause a stampede and confusion on the roads, the retreat will develop into a flight, a flight into a catastrophe. That's what worries him. Under no circumstances should the Germans be allowed to strike first. And if, of course, 70 divisions are not enough for this, then 110 divisions are quite enough. It's not clear why no one cares.

In the event of a German attack, the Thunderstorm lost the element of strategic (and tactical) surprise, and therefore became practically impossible to carry out.

Soon, Rookie and Golikov were summoned by the Chief of the General Staff, General of the Army Meretskov. According to the custom of that time, the call came at two in the morning.

Meretskov received the scouts in the presence of General Vasilevsky, Chief of the Operations Directorate of the General Staff.

Army General Meretskov knew, of course, much more than Lieutenant Colonel Rookie was supposed to know. Being one of the main developers of the Thunderstorm, he did not believe in the success of this operation and in its expediency. First of all, he believed that the army in its current state was not capable of carrying out an operation of such a scale, if only because it did not have flexible and clear control. The gigantic pincers of the global offensive conceived will disintegrate, become bogged down, left without fuel, ammunition and food long before they can close. "Thunderstorm" will only lead to great chaos, first in Europe, and then in the USSR. Any success in the Thunderstorm will destroy the army and the country, and failure will destroy, because our army does not even have a plan for a tactical withdrawal, not to mention a strategic retreat.

The recruit hit the most painful point of the Chief of the General Staff. A huge army deployed within the framework of the doctrine of a swift offensive on the western borders with its complex and multi-layered economy of modern armed forces, without a strategic withdrawal plan, can be turned into a fleeing uncontrollable crowd with one blow. However, Meretskov was already afraid to raise this issue not only with Stalin, but even with the people's commissar for defense, Marshal Timoshenko.

After some hesitation, Meretskov ordered Golikov to approve report No. 8, and the Rookie shook hands and thanked him, which meant at least leaving the lieutenant colonel in his position until further notice.

General Meretskov was to open a meeting of the highest commanding staff of the Red Army and take part in strategic games. He knew that these events were conceived by Stalin as the final polishing of the upcoming global offensive. They are not going to talk about anything else at the meeting. With difficulty, we managed to break through one report on the defense, and even then it was the defense of positions captured from the enemy in case of a deep breakthrough forward and a possible lag of neighbors or our own rear. It was forbidden to talk about withdrawal, and even more so about a major retreat, at the meeting. Meretskov really wanted to raise this issue - he understood that if he did not do this, he would not do it.

nobody.

Stalin looked through report No. 8 on December 22, having arrived at the Kremlin at about 2 o'clock in the afternoon from a nearby dacha. The summary made no impression on him. She returned to Poskrebyshev for filing in the file without any notes or instructions.

The next day, Stalin conferred with aviation generals Rychagov, Zhigarev and Smupzhevich on plans for the further deployment of airfields in the western regions of the USSR. The construction of the runways was even ahead of schedule, caponiers were dug for aircraft, people lived in tents, but the question arose of storing fuel, bombs, necessary spare parts and many other aviation equipment, which for various reasons did not fit to be stored in the open air or in unequipped warehouses. Including gliders for the planned large-scale airborne operations of the first stage of the Thunderstorm. So far, the pilots have reported that Comrade Stalin's instructions regarding landing gliders have been fulfilled. All of them are removed to hangars and special warehouses, which are strictly guarded. Stalin, however, was not informed that because of this, all the planes were put out of the hangars, including the hundred-hour scheduled maintenance. Stalin did not react to the problem of providing new airfields with fuel, sometimes supplied by horse-drawn gas tanks, the gasoline from which had to be poured into canisters, and then poured into aircraft through a funnel. It was not known how all this would have to be done in a real combat situation, but the problem of an acute shortage of gas tankers did not seem to be solved in any way against the backdrop of a sharp increase in

aircraft fleet and airfield network.

Abnormal basing and airfield service conditions led to a sharp increase in the accident rate during training flights, which the aviation commanders did their best to hide from the leader. Stalin had his own sources of information, but not wanting to exacerbate the issue, he exposed it to Rychagov with that gentle reproach that often misled those who did not yet know Comrade Stalin well enough.

On December 23, a meeting of the top leadership of the Red Army opened at the Central House of the Red Army. There were more than 270 people in total. Of course, it was clear to everyone that such a mass meeting of the country's top army leadership would not escape the attention of foreign intelligence, and therefore the meeting, on the one hand, was disguised as a military-theoretical conference, and on the other, was, as it were, a summing up of combat training for 1940 and "development of proposals for its improvement in 1941".

Soviet military science has always been distinguished by cheerfulness and optimism. Back in 1938, at the height of the all-army massacre, the General Staff developed a new plan for the deployment of the Red Army, based on the worst option for the USSR - a war on two fronts: in the east - against Japan, in the west - against a large coalition of states led by Germany, followed by Italy, Poland, Romania, Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. According to the analysis carried out then, all the opponents of the USSR taken together could put up 13,077 guns, 5,775 aircraft and 7,980 tanks on both fronts. This was ridiculous, since the Soviet Union produced 12,000 guns, more than 5,000 aircraft in 1938 alone, and tank production for the year already accounted for more than half of world tank production. The plan of the General Staff then set the troops the task: from the moment hostilities began, to inflict a decisive defeat on the opponents both in the west and in the east.

The army had many weaknesses, which were told to Stalin by Tukhachevsky and confirmed by Shaposhnikov, who took over the military educational program of the Leader of all peoples. The most terrible vices are congenital, and even more so - hereditary. The current army, no matter how it was cleaned and deformed, was born from the Red Army of the Civil War. And one of the negative consequences of the civil war was that because of it the lessons of the First World War were forgotten, and those who tried to generalize these lessons were placed in such conditions that no one heard them, even if they wanted to.

If the First World War already in its first year and a half clearly demonstrated the fact that the role of the cavalry was already close to zero, then the civil war, on the contrary, gave rise to a monstrous degenerate monster - a strategic cavalry of unprecedented size. In the absence of fixed fronts and the weak technical base of the opposing armies, the great Russian plains became the most fertile theater for the action of huge masses of cavalry, which history has not seen since the campaigns of Genghis Khan. And the war with Poland further confirmed the idea of the need for large cavalry formations in modern mobile warfare.

Each cavalry corps, led by some legendary figure like Kotovsky, owned huge plots of land, serfs - under the guise of peasants of the villages, responsible for supplying the corps with food and fodder, even sugar factories. And everyone dreamed, if not independently, of carrying out a world revolution, then, in any case, of being an advanced unit of the "world army of labor."

In the general headquarters of the cavalry, red arrows of deep cavalry raids right up to Paris and Calcutta were enthusiastically drawn on maps, thousands of tons of oats were counted to feed horses and riders, and there was even a theoretical discussion, which (like all discussions in the USSR) was followed by arrests with mortal sentences for sabotage. It was about the need to castrate combat stallions so that they would not

were distracted by mares. Opponents of this measure argued that stallions, having lost their male stimulus, would also lose the fighting qualities necessary for a cavalry drill horse.

The practical justification for the existence of a cavalry monster has always been the Polish lancers, since no one seriously spoke about the different Hungarian or Romanian hussars even in the cavalry general staff.

The Polish lancers allowed the cavalry to maintain their positions even with the rapid development of armored vehicles in the troops. The complete failure of the Polish lancers, famous for their valor and combat training, in the recently ended war of the Poles with Hitler and Stalin, served as a death knell for the cavalry, and the subsequent actions of the German tank formations on the western front overwhelmed Stalin's patience, who in a rather harsh form suggested that the cavalrymen moderate their ardor and ambition.

The cavalry units were disbanded one after another, although this was not an easy task at all. And although the cavalry units were reduced in the period from 1937 to 1940. almost five times, there were still more cavalry in the Red Army than in the rest of the world, including the camel cavalry of the Arab Legion.

During the all-army massacre in 1937-38. The "untouchable" cavalry leaders Voroshilov, Budyonny, Timoshenko and so on up to Ogorodnikov did a lot of glorious deeds, ruthlessly throwing under the knife everyone who dared to doubt the unfading value of cavalry in the modern armed forces. In addition to the thousands of officers killed, the activities of the cavalry "lobby" led to the disruption of the program for saturating the army with vehicles, to the disbandment of the mechanized corps.

But more terrible than the cavalry itself was the cavalry spirit of the army leadership. Of the entire civil war, they only remember the dashing pursuit by cavalry lavas of the retreating units of General Denikin in the autumn of 1919, when they flew south, sweeping away the scattered Cossack barriers, and then lived for many years in the hope that they would again be able to lead war horses "along the familiar roads for their beloved people's commissar."

Cavalry prowess had a strong influence on all scenarios for a possible outbreak of war. There were never two opinions in high headquarters: the Soviet Union should always start the war with a sudden, crushing blow, choosing the most favorable military and political moment for this blow.

Therefore, the preamble "if the enemy attacks", even in the conditions of the pre-war USSR, was no longer taken seriously by many. After all, they did not hesitate to announce that little Finland had attacked the Soviet Union. And when no one attacks, then you can declare a "liberation" campaign, as in Mongolia and Poland. You can respond to the "call both in the effective Baltic states and in Bessarabia. You can act in other, no less than the people", ways.

It was necessary urgently, so to speak, to "de-cavalry" the army. Even not so much in form as in spirit, since Stalin understood that his internal rejection by the army came precisely from the ideology of creating a cavalry monster fed by Leon Trotsky. Moreover, Shaposhnikov somehow remarked to him that all the troubles of the winter war with Finland occurred due to the fact that the former "Budenovites" built the entire war plan on the dashing pursuit of the fleeing Finnish army, using for this purpose, for lack of cavalry, infantry lava.

But under the conditions of sole power, "totalitarian sclerosis", as future historians will note, much (if not all) depended not on how the Yut or another "First Marshal" or Chief of the General Staff sees the future war and their own army, but how all these problems were drawn to Comrade Stalin himself - a man, of course, an outstanding, talented,

and in some areas even great, but, unfortunately, illiterate and completely non-military.

The image of a future war was drawn to Stalin by a chain of uprisings in the hostile camp of capitalism (not spontaneous, as Lenin dreamed, but carefully prepared by the Comintern), a campaign by the Red Army to help the rebels where they could not cope on their own, a war with individual capitalist countries (mainly to stimulate uprisings where they have not yet broken out), culminating in the worldwide victory of socialism, which, according to the leader, had already been built in the USSR.

After rapprochement with Hitler, having received the appropriate instructions, the Soviet mass media, interrupting the escalation of war psychosis at a gallop, began unexpectedly, on the same hysterical note, to scream about world peace, about warmongers and about the readiness of the Soviet Union to crush anyone "with little blood on foreign territory" with one indispensable condition: if he is attacked. Although everyone in the Kremlin understood perfectly well that it was worth nothing to provoke an attack on the USSR. It is enough to pick up the phone and order "who should" to fire on some of their own outposts, as happened in the case of Finland. But for the overwhelming majority of people in the country and in the army, who were not privy to Comrade Stalin's refined methods and who took everything at face value, the radio-newspaper cries about peace and "non-aggression" had a corrupting effect. For

"There is nothing more corrupting than the dream of eternal peace," as the first theoretician of barracks socialism, the unforgettable Plato, warned about.

Therefore, on the eve of the November holidays of 1940, Stalin summoned one of the youngest secretaries of the Central Committee, Alexander Shcherbakov, who dealt with issues of agitation and propaganda, oversaw TASS, the political propaganda organs of the army and industry. The leader ordered a slight change in the tone of official propaganda, for it became necessary to prepare the country and the army for a major offensive, devastating war.

Stalin ordered Shcherbakov from now on to build a system of political education based on these theses and secretly prepare the necessary visual propaganda (leaflets, posters, etc.), presenting them to him, Stalin, for approval.

Shcherbakov was a man of exceptional capacity for work and diligence. Two weeks later, the first sketches of propaganda posters were already reported to Stalin for comments and approval.

On one of the posters, done in ominous crimson colors, 80% of the useful area was occupied by a huge, crimson-red head of Lenin against the backdrop of red banners. The leader of the world proletariat had a formidably dead expression on his face, like a pagan god of war, turned by the new religion into the God of the world revolution. At the bottom of the poster, sandwiched between the beard of the leader of the world proletariat and the call: "Under the banner of Lenin, forward to the West!", Red Army soldiers in helmets marched in close formation with bayonets at the ready.

(With the exception of the poster "The Motherland Calls", created at the same time, this poster was the most popular in the first days of the war. Then the words changed a little. Instead of "Forward to the West" they began to write "Forward to victory." On the original The poster, among other data, also has the usual date of signing for printing: "December 25, 1940." Order first of all. The same is on the poster "The Motherland Calls!", Which was considered a backup if things did not go as we would like. On the evening of June 22, both posters appeared on the walls of houses.)

Stalin ordered the poster to be printed in a circulation of 5 million copies and sent to all city committees and district committees of the party and to the military registration and enlistment offices in secret packages with the inscription: "Open by special order."

Yes, Stalin had enough knowledge to understand that the cavalry should give way to tanks, he had enough knowledge in the midst of deadly and vile intrigues to save the T-34 tank and the Katyusha rocket launcher, but he well understood how cleverly both the military and engineers use his illiteracy, in order to impose his point of view, as if agreeing with him in everything. "What does it take to really win?" - Stalin asked in one of his speeches in March 1939 and answered: "For this we need three things: the first thing we need is weapons, the second is weapons, the third is more and more weapons." It was brilliant, and the country was flooded with weapons. And Stalin personally dealt with the problem of weapons, giving instructions to the developers of new weapons within the framework of his understanding of the future war, which, no matter how hard he tried to break out of the old dogmas, still seemed to him only in the form of a dashing cavalry pursuit, even on tanks.

So, to the old Leninist slogan "study, study and study military affairs in a real way," Stalin added his own - "arm, arm and arm." However, with such a concentration of not only power, but also all decisions in their own hands, and the hands, to put it mildly, not very professional, it was impossible to avoid huge gaps in the preparation of the country for such a global war, conceived, albeit in stages, but in fact with the whole world. It was impossible to direct and control such a gigantic undertaking alone. In addition to "weapons, weapons and weapons" there were still a huge number of problems that, in order to be solved, had to be identified first.

Stalin personally dealt with all the problems associated with tanks, artillery systems, aircraft, battleships, cruisers, submarines, machine guns, machine guns and rifles.

Like any purely civilian person, Stalin perceived the weapons and the picture of the future war as a "visual representation", a kind of endless chain of pictures in which, the more powerful this or that type of military equipment looked, the more it was preferable.

The battleship, of course, always looked preferable in his eyes to a frail minesweeper, a heavy tank looked better than a field telephone. In general, everything that could not be effectively represented by the "visual range", i.e. in the picture, passed by the attention of the Father of all nations. A whole branch of the military was absolutely not interested in Comrade Stalin, precisely that branch of the military, without which normal command and control of troops is simply impossible.

Stalin carried the neglect of communications through the years, crushing cybernetics in the bud as "pseudoscience alien to Marxism" and having provided the Soviet Union with a lifelong lag behind the world in the most important branch of military affairs - the system

"commands-command-control and communications", missing the beginning of a new era - the era of electronic warfare.

Almost in the same pen as communications was the military transport service, operating almost 80% with the help of horse-drawn transport, which was also an echo of the great era of "strategic cavalry".

The home front service was in an even worse state, apparently, by its very name suggesting something cowardly and shameful. In 1939, speaking at the 18th Party Congress and talking in detail about the growth and development of various branches of the military, Voroshilov nevertheless said a few words with a chuckle about signalmen, but did not mention the rear service at all.

Operation Thunderstorm, conceived as a gigantic robbery raid, generally assumed the supply of the army with captured resources.

And there's really nothing to say about the medical service, which since the Civil War

didn't get any better, to say the least. There was no trace of not only field installations for blood transfusion, morphine syringes and oxygen masks, which were already available to almost all the armies of the world, but even anti-tetanus drugs and the simplest medical instrument.

More than all Stalin's problems, as usual, the problem of personnel was concerned. None of the armed forces at the head has yet fully satisfied him. Besides himself, he did not see anyone who could lead a huge army on such a historical campaign, which was envisaged by Operation Thunderstorm. But he himself was a non-military person, and therefore had only to send into battle.

For this, he ordered to convene a meeting of the highest command staff of the Red Army, so that, having solved all the army problems, at the same time deal with the personnel. Personnel contamination again made itself felt in the People's Commissariat of Defense, and in the General Staff, and in the NKVD. This tormented the leader much more than the problems of the rear and transport of the Red Army in the global game he had conceived, where the future of Russia and its people was again thrown onto the card table.

Marshal Timoshenko opened the meeting with an introductory speech by the People's Commissar of Defense. It was short. Having determined the order of reports and regulations, the People's Commissar gave way to the Chief of the General Staff, General of the Army Meretskov, whose report had a long official title: "Results and tasks of combat training of the ground forces, air force and operational training of senior command personnel." Meretskov began his report with a review of the international situation. "The years 1939 and 1940," he pointed out, "were passing in a difficult international situation. Most of the peoples of the world have been drawn by the imperialists into a great, difficult war... At a time when the warring peoples are suffering immeasurable suffering, our mighty people, under the leadership of the great leader Comrade Stalin, thanks to his wise strategy, continue to remain out of the war and, as before, confidently move towards their goal improving their material well-being and increasing the power of the armed forces of our country ... "

Describing the war with Finland as an attempt by the imperialists to "test our might and drag us into the war," the chief of the general staff noted with satisfaction that although these repeated attempts were unsuccessful, the Red Army "gained great combat experience in modern warfare."

Emphasizing the offensive nature of the Soviet military doctrine, Meretskov emphasized that "the experience of recent wars, exercises and field trips showed insufficient operational readiness and military culture of the highest command personnel, military, army, front-line and especially aviation headquarters. This issue has not been dealt with before. For many years, there were no instructions for driving large modern formations, for putting them into battle along with tanks and aircraft ... "

Unexpectedly, as if bringing the hushed hall out of its stupor, General Meretskov begins to talk about the dangerous neglect of defense issues in the army. No, he does not dare to utter the word "retreat" which is strictly forbidden to use. He talks about defense, emphasizing that this concept has practically disappeared from the charters, replaced by the vague word "fettering the enemy", since many are simply afraid to even think that they will have to defend themselves.

"Given the experience of the war in the West," the brave Chief of the General Staff says quickly, fearing that Marshal Timoshenko will now stand up and deprive him of his word for propagating bourgeois heresies, "along with preparing for active offensive operations, we need to have an idea and prepare troops for modern defense ".

The General takes a breath, pausing. He knows Stalin's position on this issue, which, "naturally", is fully shared by People's Commissar Timoshenko and almost all those sitting in the hall, in whose

the safes have long been filled with red packets marked: "Open upon receipt of the Thunderstorm signal.

Meretskov realizes that he has gone too far, but continues:

"Modern defense must withstand powerful artillery fire, mass attack of tanks, infantry and air enemy. Therefore, it must be deeply anti-tank and anti-aircraft ... "

Stalin, listening to the speeches of the Chief of the General Staff on a special broadcast in a separate room, winces as if from a toothache. Defense again! These are very dangerous thoughts that have a corrupting effect on the combat mood of the army. No. the post of chief of the general staff was clearly not up to Meretskov. He who constantly thinks about defense will not be able to lead a swift offensive ...

But then General Meretskov came to his senses and again switched to "new speech":

"The fighting with the Japanese-Manchus on the Khalkhin-Gol River and the war with the White Finns showed the boundless devotion of the fighters, commanders and the entire commanding staff to the socialist Motherland, the party, the government and the great Stalin ...

At the present time, the government and the party, providing our army with everything necessary, demand that we be always in combat readiness. We must, under the leadership of the People's Commissar of Defense, in the shortest possible time ... achieve such a situation that, at the request of the government, we can go on a campaign at any time.

According to Meretskov himself, having stepped down from the podium, he felt emptiness around him. During the break, many colleagues were even afraid to approach him and, in any case, not to linger around him for a long time.

The meeting continued.

Very many of those present at the meeting had less than a year to live at best. Of the three main speakers developing the theory of the rapid advance of huge masses of troops and military equipment, two will be shot, and one will be imprisoned.

Many others will meet the same fate, and those who are more lucky will either die in battle or be captured.

In just seven months, he will be taken prisoner, and from there to the Gulag, the commander of the 6th army of the Kyiv OVO, Lieutenant General Ivan Muzychenko, who criticizes defensive moods in the army in the debate.

Already on June 26, Corps Commissar Nikolai Vashugin, a member of the Military Council of the Kiev Special Military District, who told the audience about cases of anti-Soviet propaganda in the troops and other intrigues of foreign intelligence that corrupted discipline, would have to shoot himself.

Captivity and the subsequent prison await the commander of the 4th mechanized corps, General Mikhail Potapov, who advocated in the debate for the creation of even larger tank formations.

The captivity and immortal glory of the biggest traitor in history await the next speaker in the debate - the already familiar commander of the 99th Infantry Division, General Andrei Vlasov.

Trial, dismissal and a large camp term await the commander of the vast Siberian Military District, Lieutenant General Stepan Kalinin, who criticized the defense and recognized only the offensive.

In July 1941, the trial and execution await the next speaker in the debate, General Vladimir Klimovskikh, chief of staff of the Western Special Military District.

In just a couple of months, arrest and execution (in October) await Colonel General Grigory Stern, commander of the Far Eastern Front, who spoke after the Klimovskys.

Arrest and execution await the next speaker, Lieutenant General Nikolai Klich, who is still the head of the artillery of the Far Eastern Front.

A happier death in battle while trying to withdraw the remnants of their defeated 33rd Army from the encirclement awaits the next acting Lieutenant General Mikhail Efremov, while the commander of the Transcaucasian Military District.

An unprecedented defeat of the parts of the North-Western Front entrusted to him, a miraculous salvation from German captivity and Stalinist retribution, along with eternal shame, await the speaker following Efremov, Lieutenant General Fyodor Kuznetsov, who is still commander of the troops of the North Caucasian Military District.

Arrest and execution await Marshal Grigory Kulik, who spoke after Kuznetsov, a veteran of the 1st Cavalry, Stalin's favorite (at this stage), deputy people's commissar of defense and head of the main artillery department of the Red Army. Not knowing his future, while he is the most famous person in the army, mainly due to tyranny and rudeness, as well as statements like: "Mines are the weapons of a weak coward", "Automatic weapons are the weapons of gangsters and the police."

Captivity and death in a German concentration camp await the next speaker: Lieutenant General Philip Yershakov, Commander of the Urals Military District.

Arrest, bullying and a long prison term await the next speaker: Air Force General Alexander Novikov (future air marshal and twice Hero of the Soviet Union, which will not hurt anyone to beat him during interrogations). But none of them know yet this...

On December 24, the meeting listens to the main report on the topic "The nature of the modern offensive operation." Commander of the Kyiv Special Military District, General of the Army Georgy Zhukov, on the podium. Timoshenko, at every opportunity, molested Stalin, begging him to transfer Zhukov to Moscow, assuring him that this was exactly the person whom Comrade Stalin was looking for to implement plans for creating a "world Commune".

In his report, Army General Zhukov, without proclaiming any toasts, immediately moved to the essence of the issue under consideration:

"As a result of the widespread introduction of modern technical means in the army, i.e. With the development of the air force, armored formations, mechanization of artillery and motorization of the army, operational art received such powerful factors as speed and impact force. Based on these technical means, on the basis of these factors, operational and tactical surprise, maneuverability and range of operations have increased significantly. The speed of development of operations is achieved mainly due to the sudden, bold and massive use of aviation, airborne assault forces, tank and motorized formations ... "

"In the conditions of our Western theater of operations," the general of the army rumbled in his low voices, "a major offensive operation with a strategic goal ... should be carried out on a wide front, at least on a scale of 400-450 km. Power of the first

The strike should ensure the defeat of at least one third - one second of all enemy forces and withdraw our forces to such an operational depth from which a real threat of encirclement of the remaining enemy forces would be created.

Such an operation will, of course, require the concentration of powerful forces and resources, and I think that such an operation on such a front will require about 85-100 rifle divisions, 4-5 mechanized corps, 2-3 cavalry corps and 30-35 aviation divisions. It goes without saying that such a number of armed forces should be comprehensively equipped with appropriate means of reinforcing artillery, tanks accompanied by infantry, engineering troops and appropriate controls ...

Air strikes must be deployed in such a space as to suppress the main mass of enemy aircraft in the airfield-based areas, inflict defeat on it, disrupt the supply of railways and dirt roads, destroy the operational actions of the enemy forces in the rear, paralyzing any attempt to regroup forces ... "

"Of course, subsequent strikes," General of the Army Zhukov continued to please the leader, "will be much deeper, and if the enemy is not only crushed by the first blow, but defeated, if he is not able to organize resistance on the rear operational lines, he, of course, must be driven to complete annihilation, it is necessary to achieve complete strategic success with one blow.

Then Zhukov switched to more specific discussions about the "army offensive operation as a derivative of the front one", which, in Stalin's opinion, could well have been excluded from the report. The army is too small an operational unit for a man of such a scale as Comrade Zhukov.

"The surprise of a modern operation," Zhukov concluded his speech, "is one of the decisive factors in victory. Attaching the utmost importance to surprise, all methods of camouflage and deception of the enemy must be widely introduced into the Red Army. Camouflage and deception must run like a red thread in the training and education of troops, commanders and staffs. The Red Army in future battles must show a high class of operational and tactical surprise. The higher command staff and the headquarters of higher formations in the near future should perfect their knowledge and skills in organizing and conducting a modern offensive operation.

Back in 1921, Mikhail Vasilyevich Frunze, while discussing the issue of a unified military doctrine of the Red Army, wrote that it was necessary to educate our army in the spirit of the greatest activity, to prepare it for the completion of the tasks of the revolution through energetic, resolutely and boldly conducted offensive operations.

The report made a strong impression not only on Comrade Stalin, who was listening to it on a special broadcast, but also on all those present in the hall. Moreover, those present, unlike Stalin, could see the expression on Zhukov's face when he read out his report. It was impressive. It seemed that the general, right from the rostrum of the meeting, with a wave of his hand, would throw armies of many millions forward with the achievement of complete surprise. The formidable energy of Zhukov, as it were, poured out into the hall, showing who exactly that "first marshal" was, that he should lead us into battle on the orders of Comrade Stalin, whose absence was so acutely felt in the army after the great leader drove his bankrupt friend Klim from his post Voroshilov.

The report of Army General Georgy Zhukov set the tone for the entire meeting. The overwhelming majority of those present knew very well that this report was written to Zhukov by his district headquarters under the general editorship of Colonel Baghramyan, who headed the operational department. That the report lay for two months in the highest offices of the Kremlin and the People's Commissariat of Defense. What

in essence, this is not even Zhukov's report, but an instruction given by Stalin himself on what specific cases it is necessary to orient the armed forces in the very near future. Therefore, summing up the debate, Zhukov had every reason to state that "there were no fundamental disagreements with my report on the part of those who spoke here."

And it couldn't be. All have long been tuned in line with this report.

On December 26, on the day of the Christmas holiday abolished as superfluous, at a meeting with the report "Air Force in the offensive operation and in the struggle for air supremacy", the head of the Main Directorate of the Red Army Air Force, 29-year-old Lieutenant General of Aviation Pavel Rychagov, speaks at a meeting. Soon - on January 2, 1941 - he will celebrate his thirtieth birthday. He does not know that only four months separate him from arrest and 10 months from execution, along with his beloved wife. He does not know this, and therefore is eager to fight.

"The presence of mobile assets, aviation and airborne assault forces in the army gives a different character to modern operations," he says to listeners excited from Zhukovsky's report. - The characteristic features of a modern offensive operation are: simultaneous impact on the entire operational depth of the enemy; a combination of an attack from the front with actions in the depth of the enemy's location by aviation and airborne assault forces; deep penetration of mobile troops behind enemy lines; simultaneous isolation of strategic reserves from the front by aviation and its disorganization of the rear of the enemy. All this is carried out under the obligatory condition of gaining air supremacy ... "

General Rychagov explains to the audience how to achieve air supremacy by destroying the existing aviation, aircraft industry, fuel and material supplies with the first, decisive and sudden strike. How? Yes, it's very simple: "In the period of preparation for an offensive operation, aviation operations must begin in advance."

Everything is clear to everyone. The repulse of imperialist aggression will begin with a sudden air strike even before it begins. And then - a sudden, crushing blow of ground forces.

In conclusion, Rychagov praised the latest aviation order No. 0362, which for the first time in the world began the practice of mass forced recruitment of pilots into aviation, not giving them officer ranks, not paying salaries and forbidding them to marry within three years after promotion to officers (although the term the production itself has not been determined).

Many claim that such a measure was dictated not by the misanthropic views of Stalin and his accomplices towards their people, but by the chronic shortage of parachutes in aviation. In any case, order No. 0362 was perfectly logical. Why, one wonders, does a suicide bomber have a family?

On December 26, Colonel-General of Tank Troops Dmitry Pavlov, Commander of the Western Special Military District, makes a report on the topic "The use of mechanized formations in a modern offensive operation and the introduction of a mechanized corps into a breakthrough." This is a special report, like the district entrusted to General Pavlov.

It was his troops, still in the four armies, grouped on the Bialystok balcony, waiting for the order to a swift throw. If you imagine the entire operation "Thunderstorm" as a deadly spear aimed at the heart of Europe, then the troops of Colonel General Pavlov are the steel tip of this spear. And the commander for this deadly tip is chosen especially.

General Pavlov fought in the First World War. During the Civil War, he served in the cavalry, was the commander of a platoon, squadron, assistant commander of a cavalry

shelf. In 1922 he graduated from the Higher Cavalry School, in 1928 - the Military Academy. Frunze, in 1931 - courses at the Military Technical Academy. He was one of the first cavalry commanders who changed his horse to a tank. Participated in battles on the Chinese Eastern Railway, in the Spanish Civil War, in the winter war with the Finns. He headed the Armored Directorate and was considered the most prominent specialist in the use of large armored formations in battle. In June 1940, he was appointed commander of the then Belorussian Military District, which in July was renamed the Western Special Military District. For the war in Spain, despite its more than sad end, Pavlov received the title of Hero of the Soviet Union, and Stalin already has an order on the promotion of the forty-four-year-old colonel general to army generals on the table.

Squat, broad-shouldered, breathing volcanic energy, sparkling with the Golden Star of the Hero, three Orders of Lenin and two Orders of the Red Banner of War, Colonel-General Pavlov appeared before those gathered in the front hall of the Central House of Culture as a symbol of power and invincibility. Of course, no one in the hall, including himself, could have imagined in the most nightmare that not even 7 months would pass before Army General Pavlov would be removed from his post and shot on July 22, 1941.

But this is yet to come, and the great happiness of not knowing one's immediate future hangs over the entire hall and over the speaker.

Starting with a historical digression, Colonel-General Pavlov quickly moves on to the future:

"A modern tank corps," he reminds the audience, "consists of two tank and one motorized divisions, a motorcycle regiment and reinforcement and maintenance units, a communications battalion, an engineering battalion and an air squadron. The tank division is the main shock force.

The presence of heavy tanks in the division (except for the USSR, no one in the world had heavy tanks), capable of completely freely solving tasks without fear of being hit by 3-inch field artillery, and the rest, not afraid of 37-45-mm anti-tank artillery calibers, the presence of flamethrower tanks, capable of burning out the surviving enemy, shows us the power of a tank division ... It is quite clear that a pair of such divisions represents a very formidable force ... Thus, a tank corps, which has great shock-penetrating power and technical capabilities, in combination with other mobile arms troops (motorized infantry, cavalry, aviation), can and should solve the following tasks:

1. Disrupt the concentration and deployment of the enemy's main forces with a sudden strike.
2. Surround and destroy the main enemy grouping.
3. Move to the flank and rear and, together with the troops operating from the front, destroy the opposing enemy.
4. The tank corps is able and obliged to expand tactical success into operational success.

Taking a pointer, Colonel General Pavlov turned to the diagrams hanging behind him.

"... After breaking through the second defensive line," General Pavlov's final words are heard, "the third stage begins, which is characterized by the fact that it requires the most decisive and quick actions to defeat suitable reserves and destroy

the main grouping of the enemy, on the withdrawal route of which the mechanized corps will firmly stand and, together with units operating from the front, will destroy the enemy.

All the war is over. The speakers fully laid out the scenario of "Thunderstorm" in their creative understanding.

At this point, the meeting could have been closed if the brave Meretskov had not insisted that, along with the offensive, they would also talk a little about defense. No, not about retreat, God forbid! But in the conditions of a rapid offensive, what can not happen! A defeated enemy in some area will take and deliver a counterattack. You have to be ready for that as well. You cannot live according to a simple scheme: crush, encircle, destroy.

The meeting was supposed to end with large operational-strategic games scheduled for January 2.

On December 29, Timoshenko presented to Stalin the procedure for holding games according to a special plan, the first stage of which would be held until January 6, and the second from January 8 to 11. On December 31, Marshal Timoshenko closed the meeting. Those assigned to the games had to stay in Moscow, the rest had to return to their districts and units.

A new one, 1941, was coming. The celebration of the New Year was not officially held in the USSR, since this holiday, like Christmas, was considered a "remnant of capitalism."

January 1 was an ordinary working day and, if different from others, it was a very large number of latecomers to work, for which a prison term was supposed. But to the credit of Comrade Stalin, it must be said that on January 1 rather liberal customs reigned in the country. It was foolish to go against age-old folk traditions.

Newspapers and radio, making forecasts for the coming year, agreed

"that it will be a very happy year." The Pravda newspaper of December 31, 1940 wrote in an editorial: "We can look back at 1940 with a feeling of deep satisfaction ... In 1940, the Party and the Government did a lot to increase the military power of the USSR and the military training of the entire Soviet people. The combat and political training of the personnel of the army and navy has improved tremendously ... in all areas we have achieved tremendous success. The New Year's Eve article ended with the following words:

"1941 will be the fourth year of the third Stalinist Five-Year Plan. Therefore, as we enter 1941, which will be a year of even more gigantic achievements for our socialist economy, the Soviet people look to the future with joy and complete confidence.

What exactly the people are waiting for was hinted at in a poem printed in a somewhat playful design on page 4 (and reprinted by many other newspapers, including the Red Star):

Our every year is victory and struggle

For coal, for the scope of metallurgy!..

Or maybe - to sixteen coats of arms

Other coats of arms will be added!

Chapter 12

Unlike the USSR, the Third Reich celebrated Christmas week. Many soldiers and sailors received short-term leave to go home. Those who arrived from the eastern borders amazed their relatives with their knowledge of the English language, asking, however, to keep this circumstance secret. After a short rest in the east they would all take part in the final crushing of England.

In Albania, the Greeks continued to drive the Italian army westward, the British agents in the Balkans continued their dirty games and, according to some reports, were already interacting with Stalin's intelligence.

In impotent fury, Hitler ordered Goering to arrange such a New Year's holiday for the Londoners, so that they would start counting their English time from him.

On the night of December 29, having formed up in several waves, German bombers, breaking through all air defense belts, appeared over the English capital, dropping thousands of high-explosive and incendiary bombs over the historical center of London. The capital of the empire had not known such a fire since 1666.

A sea of fire raged over the city, devouring palaces and temples. A high-explosive bomb landed in the church of St. Lawrence, built in 1411, in the palace of the Lord Mayor. Hitler ordered that such raids continue every night up to and including January 1st. However, thunderclouds, which poured southward from the polar regions in a wide front, frustrated this plan.

On December 30, Hitler was presented with a translation of Churchill's New Year's radio address to the English people.

"I am sure," said the indomitable English Prime Minister, "that we can consider this formidable year the most glorious, although it was the most difficult year in the long history of England and the British Empire. By the end of 1940, our small ancient island, together with the Commonwealth of Nations and the dominions devoted to it, was able to endure the brunt of the terrible struggle and all the blows of fate. We didn't fall. We didn't flinch. The soul of the English people and the English race proved invincible. Alone ... we rebuffed the tyrant at the height of his triumph In the Libyan desert, victory was won, and on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean the Great Republic comes closer to fulfilling its duty and more and more comes to our aid.

Hitler silently listened to the translation, without saying a word, and sat down to write New Year's letters. Usually letters, even very secret ones, he dictated, but here he decided to write them himself, driving the stenographers and adjutants out of the office.

One of the letters was intended for Mussolini.

"Duce! Hitler wrote. "The war itself in the West has been won. A last serious effort must still be made to crush England. In order to

to determine how we can achieve this, we must weigh the factors that will still separate England from final collapse ... In this battle ... Germany will have to make important decisions for the final offensive in the British Isles ... We have developed a plan for the complete neutralization of the English fleet and withdrawing it from the British Isles for a sufficient time so that they can land without interference ... "

Further, the Fuhrer touched upon the issues of the duplicity of the Vichy government, which forces him to be on the alert all the time, the naivety of Franco, who refused to cooperate with the Axis powers and found himself face to face with insidious England.

Turning to the situation in the Balkans, the Fuhrer noted with chagrin that "Bulgaria also does not show readiness to bind itself to the tripartite pact and take a clear position in the field of foreign policy. The reason for this is the growing pressure of Soviet Russia. If the king had immediately joined our pact, no one would have dared to put such pressure on him ... ".

"Only Hungary and Romania," continued Hitler to pour out his thoughts to "the only surviving Roman," "took the clearest position in this conflict.

Since December 13, continuous transit traffic has been carried out in the direction of Romania. Hungary and Rumania placed at my disposal the entire network of railways...

Then Hitler moves on to the part for which he sat down to write this letter - to the prospect of relations with the USSR.

"Taking into account the threat of internal conflicts in some Balkan countries, it is necessary to take into account all possible consequences in advance and develop a system of measures that would allow us to avoid them.

I do not foresee any Russian initiative against us as long as Stalin is alive and we ourselves do not become victims of any serious setbacks. I would like to add to these general considerations that we currently have very good relations with the USSR. In fact, only two issues still separate us - Finland and Constantinople. With regard to Finland, I do not foresee serious difficulties, because we do not consider Finland as a country entering directly into our sphere of influence, and the only thing we are interested in is that a second war does not break out in this area. In contrast to this, it is by no means in our interests to cede Constantinople to Russia, or Bulgaria to Bolshevism...

However, first of all," Hitler concludes his letter, "as I have already pointed out, I consider it necessary to try at all costs to weaken the position of the British fleet in the Mediterranean with the help of your fleet, the Duce, and our aviation, since the use of our ground forces in this sector cannot lead to an improvement in the situation. Otherwise, Duce, we cannot make any important decisions until March.

Yours sincerely, Adolf Hitler Berlin, December 31, 1940

This letter will be sent to Rome in such a way that Stalin will receive a copy of it before the original reaches Mussolini.

It's time for quick decisions. If this time is missed, Germany will be crushed by the steel ring of superpowers that do not even hide their intentions.

December 29 US President Roosevelt in his New Year's address to the American people stated:

"We must become the great arsenal of democracy. Any country that fights against Hitler, or is at war with him, can count on our help ... I am convinced that the Axis Powers will not win this war. My conviction is based on the latest and most reliable data."

Like this! This is said by the head of state, with which Germany still has normal diplomatic relations. He says this almost every day. His undisguised militancy began to irritate even his own supporters. This means that the war with the United States is inevitable, it has, in fact, already begun.

And the British are already kicking Italy out of the war. On Christmas Eve, Churchill made an open appeal on the radio to the Italian people, very cunningly constructing his speech, inflicting mortal insults on the Duce, Hitler and the entire German people.

"Our armies," the British prime minister broadcast, "are tearing your African army to pieces. Thousands of Italians die, thousands are captured. What is all this for?"

Italians, I'll tell you the truth. All this because of one person. One man, only one man, has drawn the Italian people into a mortal struggle against the British Empire and deprived Italy of the sympathy and friendship of the United States of America...

He brought your country to the brink of a terrible catastrophe. This man, contrary to the opinion of the crown and the royal family of Italy, contrary to the pope and all the authority of the Vatican and the Roman Catholic Church, contrary to the desires of the Italian people, who did not seek this war, forced the heirs of ancient Rome to take the side of the "wild pagans" and barbarians ...

Where did the Duce lead his people who trusted him after 18 years of dictatorial power? What difficult choice does this people face now? It stands under the fire of the entire English Empire at sea, in the air, in Africa, and is subjected to energetic counterattacks by the Greek people.

On the other hand, he calls on Atilla to come down to him with his hordes of unbridled soldiers and gangs of Gestapo through the Brenner Pass and occupy Italy, oppress the Italian people, for whom he himself and his Nazi minions have the deepest and most obvious contempt that ever or marked by history.

That's where one person has taken you, just one person.

With this, I will end my appeal until the day that will surely come when the Italian nation will once again take its fate into its own hands."

What kind of peace, what end of the war can you talk about with a person who publicly uses such expressions in your address, repeating all the conjectures and epithets of Jewish propaganda.

No particularly encouraging news comes from the East either. The Soviet press, after a short lull, again began to call on the Red Army somewhere "forward." It turns out to the west. Nowhere else.

Information came through England that throughout the second half of December, Stalin was holding some kind of secret meetings with representatives of the military elite of the country. Almost all the commanders of the districts gathered in Moscow. An English source indicated that only one question was considered at the meeting: the method of inflicting a sudden

crushing blow. German intelligence in Moscow could not confirm this, although they knew about the meeting itself. It simply summed up the results of 1940. This is done in every country, and especially in such a militarized one as the Soviet Union.

Hitler was already interested in this question from a purely practical point of view: whether or not he would have time to inflict on Stalin that very sudden blow that, according to many sources, Stalin was preparing against him. But in order to prepare a strike against the USSR, it is still necessary to do gigantic preparatory work, so much so that Moscow does not notice and suspect

Nothing.

But it is impossible to deploy 200 divisions on a thousand-kilometer border so that no one did not notice.

We need an equally large-scale operation to disinform Moscow, with very problematic chances of its successful completion. But there is no other way out.

After signing the plan "Barbarossa" (Directive No. 21), Hitler signed and approved a number of fundamental documents to mislead Moscow. These documents, in particular, say: "In the coming weeks, the concentration of troops in the East will increase significantly ..."

"... The purpose of camouflage is to hide from the enemy the preparations for Operation Barbarossa. This main goal determines all measures aimed at misleading the enemy. To accomplish this task, it is necessary at the first stage, i.e. until approximately mid-April, to maintain the uncertainty of information about our intentions that exists at the present time ... "

"... It is necessary for the British to keep the impression that we continue to prepare the landing on a broad front."

"The second phase of disinformation of the enemy begins with the introduction of the most compact schedule for the movement of echelons (May 22).

At this point, the efforts of the highest headquarters and other agencies involved in disinformation should be directed to an increased extent to present the concentration of forces for Operation Barbarossa as a widely conceived maneuver to mislead the enemy. For this reason, preparations for an attack on England must be especially vigorously pursued. The principle is this: the closer the day of the start of the operation, the cruder the means used to mask our intentions can be.

On the same day, December 31, 1940, Hitler wrote a second letter, this time addressed to Stalin himself.

"Dear Mr. Stalin, I take this opportunity, along with New Year's greetings to you personally and to all the people of Soviet Russia, with wishes of success and prosperity, to discuss a number of issues that have already been raised earlier in the course of my conversations with Mr. Molotov and Mr. Dekanozov.

The struggle with England has entered a decisive phase, and I intend not later than the summer of the coming year to decisively put an end to this rather protracted issue by capturing and occupying the heart of the British Empire - the English Isles. I am aware of the complexity of this operation, but I am sure that it will be carried out, because I see no other way to end this war.

As I wrote to you earlier (only from October 1940 to May 1941, Hitler sent

Stalin 6 personal letters. We managed to find two. The rest of the letters have not yet been found. Stalin's answers have not yet been found, although it is known where they are stored.), those approximately 70 divisions that I am forced to keep in the General Government are being reorganized and trained in an area inaccessible to British aviation and intelligence. That they cause understandable anxiety in you, I understood from conversations with Messrs. Molotov and Dekanozov. Starting around March, these troops will begin to move to the canal coast and the western coast of Norway, and new units will arrive in their place for accelerated training, which I want to warn you about in advance.

In addition, I intend to use these troops in the very near future to drive the British out of Greece, for which I will have to lead them through the territories of Romania and Bulgaria. Troops that invade England from Norwegian territory will continue to use transit through Finland. Germany has no interests in Finland and Bulgaria, and when the objectives of this war are achieved, I will immediately withdraw my troops from there ...

I especially want to warn you against the following.

The agony of England is accompanied by a feverish search for salvation from its inevitable fate. To this end, they fabricate all sorts of absurd rumors, the main ones of which can be roughly divided into two categories. These are rumors about the impending attack of the USSR on Germany and Germany on the USSR. I don't want to draw your attention to the absurdity of such nonsense. However, on the basis of the data at my disposal, I can predict that as our invasion of the (British) Isles approaches,

the intensity of such rumors will constantly increase, and,

perhaps some fabricated documents will be added to them.

I will be completely frank with you. Some of these rumors are spread by the relevant departments of Germany. The success of our invasion of the islands depends largely on the achievement of tactical surprise, so it is useful to keep Churchill and his entourage somewhat in the dark about the certainty of our plans.

The deterioration of relations between our countries to the level of armed conflict is for the British the only way to salvation, and I assure you that they will continue their efforts in this direction with their inherent cunning and deceit ...

For the final decision on what to do with the bankrupt English inheritance, as well as for strengthening the union of the socialist countries and establishing a new world order, I would very much like to meet with you personally, about which I have already spoken with Messrs. Molotov and Dekanozov.

Unfortunately, the exceptional workload, as you well understand, does not allow me to organize our meeting until the end of the crushing of England. Therefore, I propose to schedule this meeting for the end of June - the beginning of July 1941, and I will be glad if I meet with your consent and understanding.

Sincerely yours, Adolf Hitler. Berlin, 31 December 1940."

During the Christmas and New Year holidays in Berlin, total blackout was observed. The war has already managed to sufficiently change the capital of the Third Reich. Camouflage nets were stretched over the roofs of some houses, sometimes right across the street, blocking the sky for passers-by. Many storefronts and porches were filled with sandbags. On the boulevards and in the parks freshly dug anti-air cracks gaped.

Silence in the American embassy. The ambassador recalled to Washington never returned, and the chargé d'affaires a.i. also has little work to do.

Americans have not been invited to any receptions and receptions for a long time. Long gone are the days when an American naval attaché was taken around the bases of German submarines, and a military attaché could contemplate burning Warsaw directly from the turret of a German tank. He did not return from the vacation of the cultural attaché. The accreditation was withdrawn without any explanation and the press attaché was expelled from Germany. And only commercial attaché Sam Edison Woods, as if nothing had happened, continues his activities.

"For, as the great President Monroe said at the beginning of the last century, let this imperfect world perish and fall apart, but our trading operations will continue!"

They continue with Germany, and the Germans, like no one else, are interested in them, since even gigantic deliveries from the USSR can no longer satisfy the appetite of the rapidly growing armed forces and the military industry.

In November, Woods had a chance to meet with Hjalmar Schacht himself, the president of the Reichsbank, who told the American that the Führer's insufficiently thought-out policy towards the Jews (the president of the Reichsbank chose the most cautious expressions) had brought the financial system of the Reich to the brink of disaster. Germany is in dire need of a loan.

We are talking about a billion dollars with phased repayment over five years. Could Mr. Woods, using his connections with private banks in the States, help get this loan.

The American throws up his hands. He will try, but unfortunately the vast majority of US private banks are in Jewish hands. And the Jews, let it be known to Mr. Reich President, have some plans of their own for the immediate future of Germany - precisely these coming five years, about which Mr. Schacht spoke.

In addition, banks will require loan guarantees. And what guarantees can Germany now provide, whose budget deficit already resembles an abyss leading straight to hell. "Unfortunately, the education of the current chancellor is such that it is difficult for him to explain this. By declaring war on the Jews, the Führer is essentially trying to destroy the existing financial system in the world. And for this he has absolutely insufficient strength, and inevitably he will lose this war with even greater shame for Germany than it was during the time of Kaiser Wilhelm II.

"I hope," Woods asked, "you are not the only one who understands this?"

Schacht declined to answer. On that they parted.

On New Year's Eve, Sam Woods received another letter from his friend, a young aristocrat, in which, among the flyers of various small firms, was a movie ticket.

Returning from the cinema to the embassy, Woods tore open the envelope that had been slipped into the pocket of his coat in the darkness of the cinema.

The first thing Woods saw were big red gothic letters arrayed predatorily into the word "Barbarossa." A little lower: Directive No. 21. Scanning the documents with his eyes, Woods realized that they were talking about Hitler's plan to attack Russia. Like most Americans of his time, Woods knew very little and had little interest in Soviet Russia. All the efforts of American political scientists and intelligence officers focused on Japan and Germany, as the main potential adversaries of the United States in the future. However, the very fact of the intended

Hitler's transfer of the direction of the next strike aroused undoubted interest.

Woods, as expected, forwarded the documents to the State Department. Secretary of State Hull, after reviewing the contents of the documents received, immediately reported them to the President. By this time, and in addition to Woods, the State Department had relevant information regarding Germany's plans. He also had information about Moscow's plans. President Roosevelt, having received the Barbarossa plan, felt a slight excitement, which happens with a doctor who is gradually convinced of the correct formulation of a complex diagnosis. On Hull's suggestion to inform the Russians about this, Roosevelt decided to wait a little. The Russians, he heard, have their own, quite good intelligence. Let her get something herself, and from us she will receive only confirmation.

In Switzerland, in his small apartment on the outskirts of Lucerne, Rudolf Rossler failed to properly celebrate Christmas, the only holiday of the year that he truly appreciated. His fellow conspirators in Berlin began the transmission of the longest message in the entire period of their activity. For 48 hours Rossler sat at the receiver, receiving a message transmitted in eight separate blocks. It took him another 12 hours to decipher. As a result, before him lay the plan "Barbarossa" with some related documents. By this time, Rossler, who worked under the patronage of the Swiss secret service, or rather, its head, Brigadier General Roger Masson, established contact with the British. The British used his information, but did not comment on it in any way. He had no connection with the Russians. Being a staunch anti-fascist, Rossler, of course, also hated the communists, not really distinguishing shades of the same spectrum: red and brown. However, he was well aware that if Hitler was going to attack Russia, then the enemy of the enemy would inevitably turn into a friend.

The Barbarossa plan was transferred to London. As usual: no answer, no hello. Receipt only: accepted.

It was necessary to bring this information to the Russians. So did Roger Masson. Swiss counterintelligence knew perfectly well that a Soviet intelligence network was operating in Geneva. She also knew that this network was filtered by British intelligence, which introduced its officer there. But they did not touch anyone and did not interfere with anyone. Surrounded on all sides by German and Italian troops, Switzerland did everything possible to break up this ring, playing a subtle and delicate game with its intelligence and counterintelligence services, which contributed a lot to the collapse of many of the plans of the Third Reich.

In order to reach the Russians, General Masson advised Rossler to talk to his friend Christian Schneider, also a German, an emigrant who had fled Germany and did not hide his pro-communist views. Rossler really knew him from his arrival in Lucerne and even studied Morse code with Schneider. He only did not know that Schneider was working for Soviet intelligence. But General Masson knew this, and therefore recommended him to Rossler. What neither Masson, nor Rossler, nor Moscow knew was the fact that Schneider was an American agent introduced into the circles of the German anti-fascist emigration with the task of getting into Soviet intelligence. The recent massacre that Yezhov arranged in the personnel of foreign intelligence greatly contributed to the success of Schneider.

Rossler met an old acquaintance at the Unter der Egt restaurant on the embankment of Lake Firevaldshet. Wasting no time, he openly asked Schneider if he knew of a way to connect him with the Russians?

"I have intelligence information," Rossler announced bluntly, "that would be extremely useful to the Soviet Union. If they are willing to pay me for it, then

they can do it later, when I have, and I'm sure of it, even more important information for them. However, although I don't want to be taken at my word, I'm even ready to work with them just like that. Absolutely free.

Schneider was silent for a while, lowering his eyes to his plate. Then he looked up at Rossler, chewed on a piece of meat and said:

- If you do not demand payment from them, they will definitely decide that you are a provocateur. I know them well. Do you have really important information?

Rossler decided to go for broke:

Germany is going to attack Russia. Distrust flashed in Schneider's eyes.

Are you sure of your source?

"Absolutely," Rossler replied, and then added that the only condition of his cooperation with the Russians was that he would never reveal his sources of information.

– Such a condition will be the most difficult for Moscow to accept.

This ended the conversation for the time being. Shaking his head doubtfully, Schneider left the restaurant.

Schneider reappeared two weeks later. The anonymity of sources, he admitted, hinders the case. Without naming Rossler, Schneider told about him and his information to the head of the Soviet intelligence group in Geneva, but this made little impression on him. He agreed to forward Rossler's information to the Center, but no one can predict what the reaction will be there. Schneider added that in the interests of secrecy, Rossler would never have to meet with the leader of the group, nor would he with him.

They soon met, however, because Rado, as director of the Geo-Press cartographic publishing house, completed Rossler's order for the production of maps for his article analyzing Wehrmacht strategy.

The head of the group for which Schneider worked was Alexander Radolfi, a Hungarian Jew by origin, an NKVD colonel, later known as Sandor Rado.

He became famous for a 25-year sentence, which he received after the war on charges of embezzling public money, including money intended for Rossler.

He kept his word. All information was transferred to Moscow.

In addition to the Barbarossa plan, information was transmitted about the concentration of German troops in Romania, about Hitler's plan for Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Greece. Moscow's reaction was almost instantaneous. Such details can only be known at Hitler's headquarters. Not a single scout is able to find out like this. Stop developing the source immediately. This is an absolutely obvious provocateur. Rado was smart enough to ignore this order, although he temporarily stopped sending information to Moscow. He simply had no other source.

On January 5, when Hitler was listening to Admiral Raeder's report on the latest operations of the surface fleet, a message arrived that the British had captured the fortress of Bardia, which Mussolini assured of its impregnability.

Raeder's report, although it was written in the most streamlined terms, also did not say anything good. The valiant pocket battleship Admiral Scheer (as the admiral put it) crossed from the South Atlantic into the Indian Ocean, intending to operate near the Mozambique Channel. On November 30, having completed a long repair in the car, the heavy cruiser Admiral Hipper went to sea under the command of Captain 1st Rank Meisel. On December 25, the Hipper managed to detect the English convoy, but before he could do anything, the artillery of the English heavy cruiser Berwick fell upon him, calling on the radio other ships of the guard of the convoy. "Hipper" managed to put two shells into the enemy, but, obeying the instructions, Captain 1st Rank Maisel left the battle.

On New Year's Eve, the battleships Scharnhorst and Gneisenau made an attempt to break into the Atlantic from Kiel. Unfortunately, this was not possible, as the ships were caught in a severe storm, were seriously damaged and were forced to return to Kiel for repairs.

The Fuhrer listens to the report with a gloomy expression on his face.

He demands from the fleet a sharp increase in activity in order not only to bite the British, but to start a serious struggle with them for possession of the sea. He instructs the fleet to open the way for the army to the British Isles! He expects from him self-sacrifice in the name of victory, as was the case with the ancient Germans, who stopped the Roman hordes!

The admiral is silent, although he has something to object to the Fuhrer. The ancient Germans fought the Romans not at sea, but on land. Or rather, in the forests, where it would be impossible to deploy the legions in the correct battle formations.

What will the Fuhrer order to carry out the received order?

Plan Z promised by the Fuhrer actually died without being born.

And where is England, if the Kriesmarine command has already received a copy of the Barbarossa plan.

Perhaps "Barbarossa" is a fake for the British, so that they relax and finally give the opportunity to carry out the operation "Sea Lion". Or vice versa?

Having calmed down a little, Hitler more clearly explains his plans to the Commander-in-Chief of the Navy. In May, when the Bismarck and Tirpitz enter service, he intends to send a whole squadron into the sea: four battleships and all the heavy cruisers. Their task, as it were, will be the same: to strike at the English shipping.

This will force the British to gather their entire fleet into a single fist and throw it into battle with our squadron somewhere in the central Atlantic. And then they will have to withdraw their vaunted fleet from the mother country or destroy their lines of communication. At this point, we will make a triumphant throw across the canal.

The admiral was not at all inspired by the Fuhrer's plan. Because the British battleships and heavy cruisers will leave for the Central Atlantic, this will not increase the number of landing craft in Germany, nor will there be any more destroyers, worthlessly destroyed in the Norwegian adventure. And if the Fuhrer also intends to attack Russia in addition, then the invaluable supplies of materials will stop, thanks to which it is still possible to complete the construction of ships launched before the war.

Soon word came of the fall of Bardia.

On January 2, having completed the encirclement of Bardia, the British bombarded the fortress from land,

sea and air. With the Italian fleet completely inactive, the English battleship Warspite approached from the sea and began to destroy the fortress with volleys of its fifteen-inch guns. Closer to the shore, the heavy guns of the English monitors roared: Terror, Ladybird and Efis.

The bombings practically destroyed the water supply system and destroyed all food warehouses.

Hitler ordered that a draft directive on assistance to the Italians in the Mediterranean and in Greece be submitted to him immediately for signature.

Ahead of directives, in clouds of sandy dust, dive bombers of the X Air Corps of Lieutenant General Hans-Ferdinand Geisler, who has deployed his headquarters at the San Domingo Hotel in Taormina in Sicily, are already landing on unpaved airfields in Sicily. He has orders to destroy the English Mediterranean Fleet and deprive the British of the ability to transport troops and equipment in the entire area from Gibraltar to Alexandria and Port Said.

The draft directive, which received a few days later - the official name - Directive No. 22, said: "The situation in the Mediterranean region, where England is acting with superior forces (!) Against our allies, requires rapid German intervention for strategic, political and psychological reasons."

This whole directive breathed some kind of panic, so uncharacteristic of past directives signed by Hitler.

Ribbentrop urgently telegraphed Schulenburg to Moscow:

"Since the beginning of January, large German units have been transferred to Romania through the territory of Hungary.

These troop movements are due to the need to seriously address the question of the complete expulsion of the British from all Greek territory.

As regards the size of the German troops, for the time being it is desirable to continue to give evasive answers to this question.

Ribbentrop".

The instructions from Berlin were very useful to Count Schulenburg when, on the morning of January 10, 1941, he went to the building of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs to sign with Molotov another secret protocol on Lithuania, which since the times of joint annexations, everyone could not finally divide. The text of the protocol under the heading "Top Secret!" was finally agreed by 10 January and read:

"The German Ambassador Count Schulenburg, Plenipotentiary Representative of the Government of the German Empire, on the one hand, and Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR V.M. Molotov, Plenipotentiary Representative of the Government of the USSR, on the other hand, agreed as follows:

1. The Government of the German Empire renounces its claims to the strip of Lithuanian territory mentioned in the Secret Additional Protocol of September 28, 1939 and marked on the map attached to this Protocol.

2. The Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is prepared to compensate the Government of the German Empire for the territory referred to in Article 1 of this Protocol by paying Germany 7,500,000 gold dollars or 31,937,500 marks...

3. This protocol is drawn up in two originals, in German and Russian each, and comes into force immediately after its signing.

For the German government

Schulenburg.

By authorization

USSR governments

V. Molotov.

The new Economic Agreement signed on the same day took the subject of a short conversation between Molotov and Schulenburg in a completely different direction, and both sides did not say a single word about the German troops in Romania.

In addition to the secret protocol, Schulenburg and Molotov also signed an agreement on the state border.

In Pravda, which came out the next day, January 11, on the front page under the heading "Another victory for Soviet foreign policy", a photograph of smiling Schulenburg and Molotov was placed at the time of their signing an agreement on the state border.

On the same page was also placed the "Communique on the conclusion of the Economic Agreement between the USSR and Germany." The communiqué ended with a cheerful phrase that "all economic issues, including those that arose in connection with the annexation of new territories to the USSR, are resolved in accordance with the interests of both countries."

With the same enthusiasm, the Soviet press reported on the success of the German-Soviet friendship festival Comrade Stalin did not personally participate in the next festival of the Soviet-Nazi friendship, since he was busy with much more important matters. The results of the December meeting of the top command staff of the army were summed up by holding a series of operational-strategic games.

The games were held in three stages, at each of which the participants, in accordance with the tasks and input received, made decisions, executed directives in writing, combat orders, operational reports and other documents. In the space from the Baltic to the Black Seas, front-line and army formations operated, their deployment and organization openly aimed at the west.

The game participants were organizationally divided into "Eastern" and "Western". Commanded by "Eastern" Colonel-General of Tank Forces Dmitry Pavlov. His chief of staff was Lieutenant General Klenov, the head of the operational department of the headquarters was Major General Klimovskikh, and Rychagov himself commanded the Vostochny aviation.

At the disposal of the "Eastern", which at the first stage of the game were considered the North-Western Front and were supposed to deliver the most coveted blow to East Prussia, five combined arms armies, four mechanized corps consisting of 10 tank divisions, one cavalry corps, a separate rifle corps and 80 air regiments. The strike of the grouping was supported by the Baltic Fleet, commanded by Rear Admiral Alafuzov.

The "Western" was commanded by General of the Army Zhukov, and his chief of staff was a former military attaché in Berlin, then commander, and now Lieutenant General Purkaev.

The forces of the "Western", as always, were much weaker and consisted of three combined arms armies

one mechanized corps, one tank division, one cavalry division and one reserve infantry division.

The actions of the "Western" were also supported by the connection of the fleet, commanded by the young Rear Admiral Golovko.

Aviation at the "Western" was commanded by General Zhigarev, who was destined to replace the soon arrested Rychagov.

As expected, the rapid advance of the "Eastern" on Koenigsberg and Warsaw developed almost without hindrance. Crumpled and surrounded by the "Western", which was also called "blue", quickly ending organized resistance, did not even have time to roll back to new lines, as they fell into the steel pincers of the tank corps of the "Eastern", rightly referred to as "red".

Zhukov was not used to losing and, in his usual manner, complained to Meretskov about such a sharp inequality of forces, preferential conditions for the "red" and introductory, fettering the initiative of the "blue", who could not even maneuver their own troops in their operational rear. One had only to think - and the necessary bridge turned out to be blown up, the railway was put out of action, the power plant was destroyed, etc.

Okay, agrees Meretskov. He allowed the Blues to add two more armies, one tank corps, and slightly soften the introductory lines of communications and communications.

But for the "Reds", however, the main thing remains: surprise and one and a half (instead of triple) superiority - in the number of troops, tanks, artillery and aviation.

The main thing: suddenness. The suddenness of an attack always has a stunning effect, giving rise to a whole chain of catastrophes, which, in turn, multiply more and more catastrophes.

A sudden air strike that destroyed the "blue" aircraft at the airfields makes their troops defenseless from air strikes, forcing them to roll back from the border, leaving the advancing "red" thousands of tons of ammunition, fuel and other supplies.

Border airfields are thrown, which immediately capture and begin to use the enemy's air forces, which allows the aviation of the "red" ("eastern") to operate even deeper in the territory of the "blue".

However, the rapid transfer of troops from the strategic reserve allowed the Blues to stop the Reds' breakthrough and strike at the flank of their grouping in East Prussia.

Fierce battles ensued: the rush of the "Reds" to Warsaw was stopped. The front in East Prussia stabilized. The advancing failed to enter the operational space, crushing and surrounding the "Western".

And Meretskov was suddenly seized with inspiration.

He suggested, solely for the sake of working out a theoretical option, to take as a basis the composition of the forces of the parties indicated in "Summary No. 8", and slightly change the conditions of the games. Transfer the surprise to the "western" ("blue") and see what happens.

Timoshenko again tried to object, but Meretskov was unexpectedly supported by Zhukov, who sensed in this variation an opportunity to once again vividly demonstrate his offensive capabilities.

And as a matter of fact, if we are talking about games, even military ones, does it matter where they are shown: from the west, south or east. That's why games exist to invent

play and explore the most incredible options that in real life may never exist.

The blow of the "Western", led by Zhukov and Purkaev, turned out to be terrible.

"Having broken through the Eastern front in several places, Zhukov's tanks rushed deep into enemy territory, sweeping away everything in their path.

Having no right to retreat, units of the "Eastern" ("Reds"), having taken up a tough defense, quickly fell into the environment and their position became hopeless. The catastrophe in the north and in the center did not allow the southern flank of the "eastern" to carry out the planned counteroffensive.

To save the situation, Pavlov had to urgently withdraw his troops, but having no plan for the retreat, both he and the mediators clearly saw that the retreat would instantly turn into chaos and a disorderly flight.

The game was quickly abandoned.

A painful feeling gripped all the participants. Such a feeling occurs among the doomed, to whom a wonderful oracle for a moment revealed the secret of their future fate.

Upon learning of this game, Stalin was furious.

Having called the participants of the games together with Timoshenko and Meretskov to the Kremlin, the leader demanded an explanation.

As usual, everything was blamed on Meretskov, since the initiative for this disgrace came from right from him.

However, Stalin did not want to listen to any jokes. He noticed to Pavlov that he could not find the right solutions during the game and set his troops up for defeat.

Pavlov began to object that he had been subjected to a sudden blow. And these questions have never been worked out before, either theoretically, let alone practically. And he was attacked by some fantastic forces taken from the ceiling.

Finally, Stalin said:

- Comrade Timoshenko asked to appoint Comrade Zhukov as Chief of the General Staff. Let's agree.

Meretskov and Zhukov equally dead.

For the first, this meant the removal of a position with unpredictable consequences.

For the second, this meant taking up a position where he absolutely did not understand anything, which could also lead to unpredictable consequences.

Apparently, Zhukov's speech at the Meeting, as well as his actions in the game, both on the side of the Blues and on the side of the Reds, made a strong impression on Stalin.

Directly at a meeting in the Kremlin on January 12, 1941, Stalin removed Meretskov from his post and appointed Zhukov precisely the chief of the General Staff.

By this time, the type of so-called universal professional leader had already formed in the USSR, capable in theory of heading any institution entrusted to him. Yesterday he could be the director of the hospital, tomorrow - the director of the conservatory,

the day after tomorrow - chief editor of the central newspaper. Administration everywhere followed a common pattern and no major problems arose.

But even in Stalin's Russia, such a person could not be appointed to a position that required not administrative experience, but deep professional training. In other words, he could be a hospital director but not a leading surgeon, a conservatory director but not a leading conductor, and so on.

General Zhukov is a sin in half - he would have coped with the post of People's Commissar of Defense. Moreover, he would be no worse than his predecessors in this post: Voroshilov and Timoshenko. But in the post of Chief of the General Staff - a purely professorial, academic position - he instantly reached the limit of his full incompetence.

As you know, immediately after the start of the war, Zhukov was removed from the post of Chief of the General Staff, which he did not fully correspond to, and began to correct his pre-war errors.

His methods of warfare horrified even Stalin himself. But the post-war Stalin was no longer the one to properly deal with such a popular personality. All the leader could do was send Zhukov to command a remote district.

Appearing again on the scene after the death of the leader, the post-war Zhukov became famous for giving the order to test the atomic bomb on living soldiers, which happened on September 14, 1954 at the Totsk training ground near Orenburg.

What is this? Illiteracy or deliberate crime? Perhaps Zhukov did not understand what an atomic weapon was, and the advisers were afraid to report it to him? Unlikely.

This is Zhukov's usual attitude towards soldiers as the cheapest consumables.

Of the 40,000 servicemen thrown into the range, 30,000 quickly died from burns and radiation. 10 thousand became disabled. At present (1997) there are less than a thousand of them left. And these were guys 33-34 years old. birth. Only now they had to cross the sixty-year mark.

Soon after the tests, Zhukov received the fourth Star of the Hero.

For each of his stars, about ten million soldiers' lives were paid.

On January 14, 1941, Stalin, along with other members of the Politburo, endorsed the order appointing Zhukov as Chief of the General Staff and on movements in connection with this appointment.

On January 13, 1941, Pravda published a TASS Statement, which stated: "A message is being circulated in the foreign press, citing some circles in Bulgaria as a source of information, that a certain part of the German troops has already been transferred to Bulgaria, that the transfer of the latter to Bulgaria continues with the knowledge and the consent of the USSR that the USSR responded to the request of the Bulgarian government for the passage of German troops into Bulgaria consent."

With such unpretentious methods of a petty provocateur, Stalin probed Berlin.

TASS was further authorized to state the following:

1. If there really are German troops in Bulgaria, and if their further

the transfer to Bulgaria really takes place, then all this happens without the knowledge and consent of the USSR, the German side never raised the question of the presence or transfer of German troops to Bulgaria before the USSR.

But in Berlin, they have already got used to such subtle methods of Moscow and have learned to react to it, using an almost Soviet "new speech".

"German Information Bureau on the TASS statement.

January 14, 1941. In view of the large number of rumors ... regarding the alleged transfer of German troops to Bulgaria, Berlin political circles say that there is nothing surprising in the fact that the Russian official TASS agency considered it their duty to publish a refutation in connection with this message ... "

"Strictly secret.

Decree of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks on January 14, 1941.

On the Chief of the General Staff and Commander of the Military Districts

To improve the training of troops of the districts and armies, approve the appointments:

1. Chief of the General Staff and Deputy People's Commissar of Defense - General of the Army Zhukov Georgy Konstantinovich;
2. Deputy People's Commissar of Defense for combat training - General of the Army Kirill Afanasyevich Meretskov ... "

At the next report, Philip Golikov mentioned the Barbarossa plan received from an unknown source in Switzerland. Stalin sighed: "What is the source?" Golikov explained that Colonel Rado was working with this source. Where he found it and so on is yet to be clarified, the Source was given the code name "Lucy".

The fact that the British would multiply their provocations through neutral countries could be predicted. But the fact that they would go to the fabrication of Hitler's own directives was unexpected and doubtful. Stalin asked Golikov what he thought about this?

Golikov replied that no one had seen photocopies of the documents, and the texts, in principle, had to be invented quite easy.

Intelligence of the NKVD pleased the leader. Lost connections on the territory of Germany, destroyed by the enemy of the people Yezhov, are being restored. The head of the INO NKVD, Fitin, reported that immediately after the New Year, NKVD resident Alexander Korotkoe, acting under documents in the name of Alexander Erdberg, left for Germany, where on January 7 he met with the "Corsican", who informed him that conviction was growing in the aristocratic and intelligent circles of Germany that Germany will lose this war. The era of high-profile victories of the Wehrmacht is over, a protracted war has begun, which everyone was so afraid of, and therefore opposition to Hitler is growing not only in these initially cosmopolitan circles, but also in the army. In addition to everything, there is a persistent rumor in Berlin that Hitler decided to attack the USSR. Then it's really over.

On January 10, 1941, a call from Washington informed Churchill that the personal envoy of the President of the United States, Harry Hopkins, was arriving in London. The whole of America, and therefore the whole world, knew about the Hopkins mission.

The day before, at a press conference, journalists literally clung to Roosevelt, trying to

find out the reason for Hopkins' trip. The newspapers published the following transcript:

“Question: Is Mr. Hopkins on any special mission, Mr. President?

Answer: Not at all.

Question: Has he been assigned any rank?

President: Oh no.

Question: Mr. President, is it safe to say that Mr. Hopkins will not be appointed as the new ambassador?

President: As you know, Harry is not in good health for this job...

Question: Will anyone accompany Mr. Hopkins?

President: No, and he will not have any powers.

Question: But will he be given any specific assignment?

President: No. You will not be able to fish out anything interesting. (General laughter.)

When Churchill was informed that Harry Hopkins was going to visit him, the prime minister asked in bewilderment: "Who is this?" (Stalin asked the same question when, in July of that year, Roosevelt sent his closest friend and adviser to the Kremlin to pull Stalin out of the cesspool into which he had fallen under the weight of his brilliant plans.)

When the Prime Minister's parliamentary secretary, Brendan Bracken, explained to Churchill who Hopkins was, the Prime Minister immediately ordered "all the red carpets that had survived the bombings be laid out in front of him."

Although the President tried to assure the public that Hopkins had no assignments, he gave his friend before leaving something like a letter of recommendation that read: as my personal representative. Please also send a similar message to His Majesty King George VI.

Naturally, you will tell our government anything that will come to your attention in the course of your mission and that, from your point of view, will serve the most important interests of the United States. Wishing you all the best for the success of your mission, I remain sincerely devoted to you, Franklin D. Roosevelt.”

But the most important message Hopkins had to convey orally.

Having met with Churchill and, with purely American spontaneity, interrupting the protocol part, Hopkins leaned towards the prime minister and quietly but distinctly said:

“The President firmly decided that we must win the war together. Let there be no doubt about this. He sent me here to inform you that he will support you at any cost and by any means, whatever the cost to him personally. There is no such thing in the world that he will not do, if only it is within the limits of human

strength.”

The German press reacted nervously to Hopkins' visit to London. The newspapers wrote that Hopkins came to "trade the remnants of the British Empire for another batch of rusty American scrap metal and the form of World War I destroyers."

English leaflets continued to rain down on Germany, predicting Germany's imminent end and offering to overthrow Hitler and surrender before it was too late.

German leaflets, also liberally dropped over England, predicted the imminent end of the British Empire and its "greedy and predatory mother country", when German troops, as soon as the weather cleared, would land on the islands.

In Hitler's personal cinema, a newsreel of the Luftwaffe attack on the British fleet in the Mediterranean was shown, cleverly assembled from English and German materials.

Ju-87 dive bombers - Stukas - with a howl and roar attacked the newest English aircraft carrier *Illustrious*, leading a convoy of transports to Malta and Piraeus. The aircraft carrier engulfed in flames, covered with water columns of close explosions of air bombs, really seems doomed. The cheerful and solemn voice of the announcer announces its sinking. Another great victory for the Luftwaffe! On the same day, January 10, the announcer adds, another English aircraft carrier *Ark-Royal* was sunk in another battle. The dominance of the British at sea has come to an end.

Hitler allowed the footage to be used in the weekly film magazine *Die Voche Rundschau*. The people were already hungry for some high-profile combat episodes proving the invincibility of German weapons. But the Fuhrer's heart was not very cheerful. He knew that none of the British aircraft carriers had been sunk. The *Illustrious*, although it received several direct hits from aerial bombs, made it safely to Malta, and the *Ark Royal*, as intelligence found out, was not attacked at all. But for three days of action over the Mediterranean Sea, the 10th Air Corps lost 27 aircraft. Most of the pilots were captured by
the English.

On January 14, Hitler, in the presence of Keitel and Jodl, received the Romanian dictator Antonescu, who had arrived in Berlin on a brief visit. Hitler directly asked him what Bucharest was going to do if Stalin's troops made an attempt to annex another piece of Romanian territory?

- Fight! Antonescu answered firmly.

On January 15, Halder presented himself to the Fuhrer on the occasion of his return from vacation.

The fresh and rested chief of the general staff appeared before Hitler, who was not in the best mood.

After greeting Halder, Hitler silently handed him the latest piece of English propaganda in the form of a leaflet predicting the end of Germany under the combined blows of England, America and Russia. "England hopes for America and Russia," Hitler commented gloomily on the leaflet. - What is the purpose of England in this war? She always aspired to dominate the continent. Consequently, she will try to defeat us on the continent. So I must be so strong on the continent that this goal can never be achieved! Therefore, in 1941, we must strengthen our positions on the Continent to such an extent that in the future we will wage war with both England and America.

On January 17, Soviet Ambassador Dekanozov appeared at the German Foreign Office and

presented a memorandum with the following content: "According to reports, there are a large number of German troops in Romania, which are currently preparing to enter Bulgaria, with the ultimate goal of occupying Bulgaria, Greece and the straits ...

In view of all this, the Soviet Government considers it its duty to warn that it will consider the appearance of any kind of foreign armed forces on the territory of Bulgaria and the Straits as a violation of the security interests of the USSR. The Soviet government cannot be indifferent to events that threaten the security of the USSR.

On January 22, Weizsacker received Dekanozov and verbally informed the Soviet ambassador of the answer to his statement of January 17, and then handed him the text drawn up in the form of a memorandum.

"We are sure, he declared, that our plans serve the interests of the USSR, which, without a doubt, is also against England gaining a foothold in these areas."

In Germany, "Dzi Friedrich" is noisily celebrated. The showcases display portraits of the great king. Mostly in one pose: full-length, leaning on a massive cane, the great king is watching the battle.

A single motive runs like a red thread: one against all of Europe. For many people, this evokes grim analogies. The great Frederick nearly destroyed Germany. The French captured the Rhine provinces, the Danes - Schleswig-Holstein, the Russians - Koenigsberg and Berlin.

The main thing: Frederick did not seek peace, but fought to the end. On this occasion, Hitler received the military. Commanders of the branches of the armed forces: Brauchitsch, Goering and Raeder with their chiefs of staff, field marshals and retired field marshals, colonel generals and full generals.

Hitler's relationship with the army remained difficult, although the Fuhrer began to fight for the army long before he came to power.

Many remembered how in September 1930 the Supreme Court of Weimar Germany tried three lieutenants from the Ulm garrison on charges of spreading Nazi propaganda among military personnel. The government fought with all possible forces against fascism in the army. However, the youth of the army became more and more infected with the ideas of Nazism.

The Minister of War, General Wilhelm Groner, in order to avoid unnecessary publicity, wanted to try the young lieutenants in a closed military court, but one of the accused, Lieutenant Wilhelm Scheringer, managed to report this to the Nazi newspaper Volkischer Beobachter, which made a terrible noise about the infringement of democracy and publicity and the return of the dark era of the last war - the era of "closed military tribunals". The result was an open trial.

The defense called Hitler himself as a witness. I must say that before coming to power, Hitler repeatedly sued someone, acting either as a plaintiff, or as a defendant, or as a witness. Not only did he not avoid the courts, but he himself rushed to them in order to once again publicly declare his views and intentions.

Hitler rushed to this trial with particular enthusiasm. He felt the instinctive distrust that the army had for him and was ready to do anything to dispel this distrust. The fate of the three young officers, of course, worried him immeasurably less than the possibility of enlisting the support of the entire officer corps.

"These three young people," he declared at the trial, "are gravely mistaken if they think that we

we even speculatively discuss the possibility of an armed rebellion. To come to power, we are going to use only constitutional means. I will never allow myself a single step that would put me in such a position that I would be forced to fight the German army. Against. When the government of our country passes into my hands, and this is a matter of a few months, I will consider the current gentlemen of the officers as the core from which the great army of the German people will grow.

Hitler spoke with his left hand on his heart, and his right, clenched into a fist, extended forward. The rumble went through the hall, interrupted by uncertain applause. With this speech, Hitler won the Reichswehr, clearly making it clear that he did not intend to split the army, sucking his supporters out of it. He wants it all, but not before he becomes head of state.

The verdict of the court - 1.5 years in prison for each of the accused - did not satisfy anyone then. For those who sympathized with Hitler, the sentence looked too harsh. For others, it's too soft. If the judges had acted with all the strictness of the law, they might have been able to restore some confidence in the future to the army and bring the officers out of the hypnotic shock caused by the speech of Hitler, who spoke for an hour and no one dared to interrupt him. The timidity of the Leipzig judges finally demoralized the army, throwing it into the arms of Hitler.

She (the army) did not rejoice, but did not protest when, 34 months after the trial in Leipzig, on July 14, 1933, Hitler's decree appeared, which said:

"The German National Socialist Workers' Party is the only legal political party in Germany."

The army did not show itself in any way when the elections were canceled, the post of president was abolished with the death of Field Marshal Hindenburg, the constitution was canceled and Hitler, being chancellor, officially declared himself "the Fuhrer of the German nation."

The army stirred up a little after the publication of the anti-Jewish Nuremberg laws. The army, air force and navy refused to extradite the Jews from their midst. Oddly enough, Hitler did not insist. Such well-known Jewish officers as Bakenkeler, Grassmann, Rogge, Milch and many other lesser known ones remained in the cadre of the armed forces until the very collapse of the Reich. Goering's words: "In my headquarters I myself decide who is a Jew and who is not" became a kind of guide to action.

Representatives of the highest echelon of the German officer corps were perplexed and considered Hitler's anti-Semitic policy a major tactical mistake. They quoted the famous words of the Kaiser, who once said:

"There are no Jews in Germany, but there are Germans of the Jewish faith. Without their help, Germany would never have been great."

Wouldn't it be better to have money, enterprise, brains and international connections of Jews on your side?

However, knowing the opinion of the senior officers on this matter, Hitler from time to time tried to explain to the generals the roots and origins of his attitude towards the Jews.

"Our era marks the beginning of the most ruthless struggle for world domination. This struggle is actually between two nations - between the Germans and the Jews. Everything else is just an optical illusion. The Israelis stand behind England, the USA and the USSR. Even if we expel the Jews from Germany, they will still remain our enemies on a world scale ...

By placing me at the head of Germany, the higher powers pointed precisely to the German people as the new Chosen People! And two nations cannot be elected at the same time. We are now the people of God! The time of the Jews is over. Two supernations cannot exist at the same time! One of them must be destroyed."

From a purely military point of view, it was not clear why, at the beginning of the process of one's own revival, one should immediately challenge the "supernation", which, according to the Fuhrer himself, rules over the world. If Hitler was so obsessed with the idea of fighting the Jews, then this struggle could be started later, when the forces were at least a little equalized. If the Jews really are a powerful "world force", then the results are already evident: only a year and a half of the war has passed, and Germany is already surrounded by enemies, and most importantly, without friends. And she is no longer busy with the search for victory, but with the search for salvation. The Fuhrer's plans will lead to the fact that in addition to England, in the very near future, he will have to fight the USSR and the USA, i.e. with the whole world.

Hitler's attempts to instill in the military the simplistic truth that no matter what fronts they fight on, they fight the Jews everywhere, did not reach the military. Many perceived the war with England as a tragedy, where their friends and relatives were full. So it was in the last war, so it happened in the present. Hitler could no longer vouch for how the army would behave if it were some kind of miracle in the British Isles. There would have been no fraternization, as in the First World War, which ultimately hastened the collapse of the Kaiser's Germany.

But it was pure theory. Hitler knew perfectly well that he would never reach England, and even more so the United States.

The short time that he still has must be used to knock Stalin out of the future game.

But deploying their armies to the East, it was necessary to reckon with the fact that almost the entire military elite of the Wehrmacht, including division commanders, was infected with the so-called "spirit of Rapallo." In decoding, this meant that most of the leading German officer corps, primarily tankers, pilots and submariners, were trained and educated in the Soviet Union. This story was old and began on Easter Sunday, April 17, 1922, when an agreement was signed in the quiet Italian resort town of Rapallo, restoring diplomatic relations between Germany and the Soviet Republic.

Germany lay humiliated and defeated after losing the First World War. Russia, devastated by world and civil wars, squeezed in the iron grip of the totalitarian communist regime, was isolated from the whole world, which put up something like a "cordon sanitaire" against it.

The Treaty of Rapallo was her first breakthrough into the international arena. The rest of Europe and America made fun of this alliance, calling it the "blind and lame" alliance, the "beggars' pact", and so on. But, as the further development of events showed, they made fun of the union of two outcasts in vain. In addition to mutually beneficial trade, providing jobs in Germany and the influx of new technology into the USSR, both sides quickly forged military ties.

The initial tasks of the military cooperation between Germany and Russia were formulated by the former head of the Kaiser's secret service, Colonel Walter Nicolai, the old and good curator of the Bolsheviks from the time before the February revolution.

It is not known whether the old colonel met with Lenin, but he met with the members of the Leninist Central Committee more than once, instructing them in detail and thoughtfully. One of the old

Colonel Nicolai's staff was Karl Radek, a close friend of Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin, who was then in charge of Soviet foreign policy propaganda. In particular, on his instructions, the Comintern, for its part, also joined the struggle against the Treaty of Versailles, calling it a capitalist offensive against the German proletariat.

Regarding military cooperation, Radek wrote: "The new Soviet army is ready to provide unlimited opportunities for experienced German officers. We need help to restore the completely destroyed Russian military machine. In exchange, the Soviet Union will be able to produce weapons that the Reichswehr is forbidden to have, and the Reichswehr will be able to learn how to use these weapons by undergoing combat training on Russian soil.

After carefully probing the German reaction, the Soviet Ambassador Krestinsky made direct proposals on this score to the German War Minister Otto Gessler and the commander of the Reichswehr, General Hans von Seeckt. As a result, a whole package of secret agreements was signed, according to which annually, until 1930, a third of the annual budget of the Reichswehr plus 120 million so-called "stabilized" marks were invested in a strange cartel, which had a rather intricate name: "Industrial Development Corporation". Junkers aircraft were designed and built in Fili and Samara, artillery shells in Tula and Zlatoust, the production of chemical warfare agents was established in Krasnogvardeyets, and Leningrad provided its research and production base for the creation of new submarines.

At the same time, for the combat training of specialists of the German army, three large training bases were deployed in Lipetsk, Voronezh and Kazan. Future officers of the Luftwaffe were trained in Lipetsk and Voronezh, and tankers were trained in Kazan, who in the future were to hit the whole world, and most of all Russia, with mortal blows from tank wedges. 20 thousand future officers of the Wehrmacht underwent combat training at air bases and tank sites of the Soviet Union.

It was a fantastic undertaking. Prototypes of aircraft and tanks, developed in Germany and secretly made there in one copy, were delivered by sea in parts to Leningrad through the free port of Stettin. There they were assembled and tested at the test sites, and then entered mass production at Soviet factories. The first prototypes of the Yu-87 dive bomber and the future Me-109 passed tests at Soviet test sites

Until the end of their lives, German pilots and tankers considered Lipetsk and Kazan to be their Alma Mater. Without their preparation, it would have been impossible to create in the shortest possible time neither the powerful formations of the Luftwaffe, nor the legendary tank groups of Guderian, Hoth and Manstein.

At Soviet training grounds, officers of the Red Army trained side by side with German officers in no less numbers, inevitably creating a spirit of common military brotherhood, which, according to the plan of the organizers of this large-scale event, should eventually develop into the spirit of the strongest military alliance in history.

The future military alliance matured not only in joint tough exercises, where both Germans and Russians died equally often, but in the quiet of the offices of the top military leadership of the two countries.

The commander of the Reichswehr, General Seeckt, hatched a plan to attack Poland as the first step towards the elimination of the Treaty of Versailles, since he considered Poland to be a French outpost in the east. His plans found a lively response from Mikhail Tukhachevsky and other leaders of the Red Army. They directly demanded the conclusion of a military alliance with Germany, scaring Stalin with the possibility that Germany could be lured to them.

Western countries and a united military alliance to launch a campaign against the USSR. Brotherhood in arms below and unified military plans at the top gave rise to exactly what was called the "spirit of Rapallo" and, of course, even the very idea of a possible military clash between the USSR and Germany could not have occurred to anyone even in a nightmare.

Hitler's coming to power crossed out all far-reaching plans, but the "spirit of Rapallo" - the spirit of military fraternity in arms - took deep roots in both the Soviet and German armies.

Stalin solved this problem with his characteristic ingenious simplicity, having shot everyone related to those events: from Radek, Krestinsky and Tukhachevsky, to the commandants of the airfield in Lipetsk and the tankodrome in Kazan.

However, Hitler could not disregard the moods of the officer corps. On the one hand, the "fraternal people" are the British, on the other, brothers in arms. How will the army behave in the coming deadly battle with the "brothers"?

The third term in office developed in Roosevelt the strongest dictatorial inclinations, which had no analogue in a country like the United States. Outwardly, all democratic procedures were observed, but in fact the country's policy was determined by a narrow circle of people directed by the president. Cabinet members knew nothing about the plans and intentions of the president, especially in everything related to foreign policy issues.

Together with Cordwell Hull, Roosevelt had already prepared a decree on an embargo on trade with Japan if she did not stop expansion in Southeast Asia. Then all Japanese assets in American banks will be frozen. Two or three ultimatums with insulting turns. All this will be enough for the offended samurai to draw his sword and be killed by a point-blank shot.

Preparing the country for war, Roosevelt had already decided to create a joint intelligence service of the United States and Britain, calling this institution the Office of Strategic Services. The British gladly agreed to set up a similar institution headed by an American. Officially, the United States did not have any intelligence agency. The FBI was mainly involved in counterintelligence and crime fighting. Military Intelligence - In their specialized affairs, State Department Intelligence operated within a very tight diplomatic framework. The global tasks that President Roosevelt thought to put before his country required global intelligence support.

At the head of the new intelligence agency, Roosevelt decided to put a fairly well-known lawyer, William Donovan. A participant in the last war, a colonel in the US Army Reserve, Donovan had the talent to get any information and the ability to ingratiate himself with the devil himself.

Returning from Europe, Donovan was filled with creative optimism.

"Stalin will never attack first," Donovan reassured the president. - Now he is apparently the last person in the world who still believes in the Sea Lion operation, and Hitler spends a huge amount of time and resources so that Stalin does not lose faith in this. Stalin is waiting for his landing in England in order to start his victory march, and Hitler assures everyone that somewhere in late June or early July he will certainly land in England.

On January 28, General Halder convened a meeting on practical preparations for Operation Barbarossa. The picture turned out to be completely bleak. There was a catastrophic lack of transport. The army was provided with gasoline for three months of hostilities. Approximately the same time is calculated for the consumption of all types of ammunition. Diesel fuel - for one month of hostilities. In other words, given the cost of strategic deployment, all stocks will only last for two full months of military

actions. Most vehicles will have to be mobilized from the civilian sector. Automobile, aviation and artillery tires are understaffed by more than 70%.

(It is hard not to remember that, among other things, during the war the Americans delivered 12 million automobile, aviation and artillery tires to the USSR. Stalin received more than 150 thousand heavy American trucks).

An exceptionally joyful event awaited the Soviet people. On January 30, newspapers and radio published the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Council that the huge punitive monster of the NKVD swelled so much that it was divided into two independent People's Commissariats - Internal Affairs and State Security, and Comrade Beria L.P. received the title of "General Commissar of State Security", which corresponded to the title of Marshal of the Soviet Union. At the same time, somehow imperceptibly, a message came about the appointment of Comrade Merkulov V.N. People's Commissar of State Security. And absolutely nothing was reported about the fact that it was on January 30 that General of the Army Zhukov, returning from Kiev, where he handed over the district to General Kirponos, began to fulfill his new duties as Chief of the General Staff of the Red Army.

On the eve of the commemoration of Vladimir Ilyich, People's Commissar Timoshenko issued a secret order "On the enrollment in the cadres of the Red Army of the commanding staff of the reserve, called up for mobilization" (No. 023), which said:

"The commanding staff of the reserve, drafted into the ranks of the Red Army for mobilization on the basis of the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of September 23, 1939 and detained until further notice in accordance with the order of the NPO of the USSR No. People's Commissar of Defense of the USSR

Marshal of the Soviet Union S. Timoshenko.

By this remarkable order, all reserve officers, called up back in 1939 for a campaign in Poland and the war with Finland, were to remain in the army forever. The vast majority - until the end of life.

Having reviewed the general studies of his predecessors: Yegorov, Shaposhnikov and Meretskov on Operation Thunderstorm, Zhukov correctly decided that if February is already in the yard, and the operation is scheduled for July-August, then it is necessary to deploy troops, transform districts into fronts, form front-line headquarters. That is, take things seriously. To draft another 800 thousand people into the army. To oblige industry to further increase the output of all types of military equipment, taking into account its inevitable "expenditure" at the first stage of the war.

It is clear that only Stalin could solve such questions, who, having learned about the arrival of Zhukov from Kyiv, ordered him to quickly get in the know and report back.

Zhukov was "in the know" during the week "for 16 hours a day", consulting with the highly experienced Shaposhnikov and his old developers: Vasilevsky and Vatutin.

On February 8, Timoshenko and Zhukov went to see Stalin at a nearby dacha.

Stalin met Zhukov's proposal with caution. Deploy fronts and front headquarters? The front is the largest grouping of the armed forces, created only in wartime. The front must have a control service, a headquarters. Under his command are several armies, air divisions, a front-line air defense system, special communications units, reinforcements, engineering troops and, of course, front-line rears. In total, about a million soldiers and officers. In peacetime, there are no fronts. There are counties. The creation and deployment of the front indicates that peacetime has ended and wartime has begun. A

the enemy will definitely find out about this, since it is almost impossible to hide such a large-scale event.

So Stalin said no. It's too early. We will provoke the Germans to the first blow.

Choosing the most tactful formulations of old-fashioned expressions, using professorial intonations in his voice, explaining to the patient in simple terms the symptoms of his complex illness, Marshal Shaposhnikov delivered a short speech, which boiled down to the following.

How does Comrade Stalin imagine Operation Thunderstorm in general? The government makes a decision to start it, the people's commissar of defense gives a direct command to the border districts - and the troops went? No, Comrade Stalin, that's not how things are done. It is necessary to deploy fronts and front headquarters. This is a long and tedious business. If we start right now, then God forbid to manage by the end of May.

- The whole point is this and lies in the fact that the first blow can only be delivered by the one who first deploys armies, creates battle fronts and controls them. The presence of any number of troops, in principle, does not matter much if the indicated measures are not carried out.

For example, on our western border at present there are from 70 to 99 enemy divisions. And we are calm. Why? Not only because these forces are too few. And small forces can deliver such a sudden blow, the consequences of which can be catastrophic. But because front-line headquarters or headquarters of army groups are not deployed on our border, as is customary with the Germans. That is, all these divisions, about which Comrade Golikov and his subordinates are so worried, simply cannot move forward. We see a different picture in the West. In preparation for the invasion of England, the Germans deployed three front-line headquarters: two in France and one on the west coast of Norway. This is evidenced by all the intelligence and analysis of radio intercepts.

"Besides," continued Shaposhnikov, "Hitler is clearly not up to us now. He needs to save his ally, Italy, from collapse. And do it quickly. Because he didn't have time to think. On February 8, the United States Congress in the first reading passed a law on the so-called "Lend-Lease". This is tantamount to a declaration of war. According to our information, the United States will be ready to enter the war no later than the beginning of 1942. By this time they will have completed the first phase of their impressive weapons program. However, all America's efforts will be in vain if Hitler captures the British Isles by this time, because all Roosevelt's plans are based on the transfer of American troops and military equipment to England in order to strike at Europe from there. This, of course, is a theory. Personally, I believe that such a landing operation is absolutely impossible in practice. But it's not that. Let's get back to the facts. To save himself from imminent catastrophe, Hitler must land in England during the short period of favorable weather, which, according to many years of observation, sets in the English Channel from about the beginning of July to the end of August.

By that time, of course, we must be fully prepared if we want to realize the tasks set by the Party and by you personally, Comrade Stalin.

Yes, Stalin perfectly understood the need for all the measures proposed by the top leaders of the Red Army, whom he himself carefully selected and appointed to

the posts they hold.

But after all, such large-scale events cannot be hidden, and they can force Hitler not only to postpone (or even cancel) the upcoming landing in England, but, in turn, to take measures against such a blatant threat from the East.

From the mid-thirties, Stalin had at his disposal the well-known Berlin psychiatrist Dr. Arthur Kronfeld, who lived in Moscow. The uniqueness of Dr. Kronfeld was that he managed to conduct a psychiatric examination of Hitler. In May 1932, Hitler sued "for slander" against a certain Werner Abel, who accused the future Fuhrer of receiving 10 million lire from the Italian fascists. The scandal erupted over the fact that the National Socialist Party, represented in the German parliament, was financed from abroad, which was prohibited by law.

Since from the very beginning of the process the plaintiff and the defendant accused each other of abnormality, the court, at the mutual request of the lawyers, invited a psychiatrist for an official examination of both. Dr. Kronfeld's conclusion was unequivocal: Hitler was a pronounced psychopath. "Hitler of medium height," Dr. Kronfeld wrote in conclusion, "narrow shoulders, wide backside, thick legs, heavy gait emphasizes the ugly body structure. An insignificant mouth, small cloudy eyes, a short skull, an overly large chin emphasize the well-known degenerative primitiveness ... He incredibly grimace, constantly in some kind of restless movement. Hitler has convulsive epileptic seizures. Psychopaths of this type, Dr. Kronfeld pointed out, are prone to depression from time to time, from which they usually come out in a state of completely uncontrolled aggressiveness. Uncontrolled aggressiveness allows you to forget about the risk and rush at a much stronger opponent, who is often not able to provide adequate resistance, while under the influence of a powerful impulse of madness energy. The energy of madness was precisely the topic that Dr. Arthur Kronfeld researched fundamentally.

After Hitler came to power, Dr. Kronfeld immediately left Germany, since he was also half Jewish. In 1935, the professor, with his wife and his favorite assistant, Erich Sternberg, arrived in the USSR. Unlike other political emigrants, he settled down very well, having received a luxurious apartment, where he brought his richest library, a collection of French erotic bronzes and luxurious furniture from Switzerland. Having received the opportunity to practice richly in Moscow, Dr. Kronfeld personally advised Stalin, together with Professor Snezhnevsky, conducted psychiatric examinations for the NKVD, and dealt with the fundamental problems of psychiatry.

In 1939, on the instructions of the NKVD, Kronfeld published a secret pamphlet published by the printing house of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks) with a circulation of 50 copies (after the start of the war this book was published openly and in a much larger circulation) and entitled "Degenerates in Power", where he gave a thorough psychiatric analysis of all leaders of the Third Reich. In 1940-41, Dr. Kronfeld was repeatedly called to the Kremlin to the Lubyanka, advising the highest officials. He also fulfilled the secret order of the People's Commissariat of Defense, developing a methodology for the selection and training of persons entering aviation schools, and a set of psychological tests for them. (It is interesting to note that the head of the newborn American intelligence, William Donovan, ordered the famous American psychoanalyst Professor Langer to conduct a psychological analysis of the personalities of Hitler and Stalin.

As a result of studying the biographies of European leaders, analyzing information about their inclinations, behavior in various situations, their obsessions (about their own messianic role with the Fuhrer, about "communism as a bright future for all mankind" with Stalin), suicidal tendencies that manifested themselves in Hitler in 1933 year, and Stalin's in 1936, Professor Langer came to the conclusion that the famous psychiatrists Bekhterev and Kronfeld had come to before him, which said that Hitler was a psychopath, and Stalin was paranoid. The difference between the two terms is that the term "psychopath" refers to the disease in its acute form, while "paranoid" refers to the chronic form.

Note that if Bekhterev was poisoned after his famous diagnosis, then almost the same fate awaited Professor Kronfeld. In any case, the official

the version of his death reads as follows:

In October 1941, when German troops came close to Moscow, panic broke out in the capital, resulting in a general flight. Official papers were burned in the city, prisoners were destroyed, houses and government buildings were mined. In all the turmoil, Dr. Kronfeld was simply forgotten. The prospect of a new meeting with his old patient Adolf Hitler was so terrible for Arthur Kronfeld that the professor and his wife were gassed. They were found dead on October 17 in their own apartment.

So it was or otherwise, it is not known, but the fact remains that all the famous psychiatrists who were admitted to the examination of the most famous maniacs in the world did not die by their own death).

Since we know nothing about our own brain, except for the very fact of its existence, we cannot know the nature of that powerful, hypnotic energy that the brain afflicted with this or that disease spreads around itself. But for some reason, only outright madmen and epileptics succeeded in mastering the masses, exterminating some and knocking others into ranks, blinding them and then leading them along different roads into one abyss. This is one of the most interesting mysteries of mankind.

On February 9, 1941, a squadron of British ships, demonstrating their frank contempt for the Italian fleet, appeared at the powerful Ikyan naval base and the largest commercial port of Genoa. The English ships left Gibraltar under the command of Admiral Sir James Somerville, who held the flag on the battlecruiser Rinaun. Behind him, baring their terrible barrels of their eight fifteen-inch guns, came the ship of the line Malaya. The cruiser Sheffield led the covering ships, and the aircraft carrier Ark Royal kept a little more seaward, whose aircraft were preparing to support the actions of the battleships.

Turning to a combat course, "Rinaun" and "Malaya" began bombarding Genoa, sending 6 fifteen-inch shells to the city and port every 40 seconds.

The effect was horrendous. Huge shells demolished high-rise buildings in the city and port. Drowned transports loaded with German tanks and soldiers, intended for transfer to Africa to help the dying Italian army. Machine-building plants of the Ansaldo company were burning, ammunition depots were burning and collapsing, oil tanks were exploding. Having fired 400 shells, the English squadron retired with dignity, losing 1 aircraft.

On the same day, British bombers hit Messina and Naples.

Starting from February 2, British aviation day and night bombed the ports of Northern France: Cherbourg, Le Havre, Calais, and the Belgian port of Ostend, destroying docks, cranes, moorings and warehouses, mercilessly drowning all enemy transports that dared to go there.

On February 10, the British dropped an airborne assault, which, taking advantage of surprise, captured the port of Calabria at the southern tip of Italy, destroying everything that was possible in the port and seizing a lot of secret documents and equipment. The approaching destroyers took the paratroopers on board and left, firing several farewell salvos at the port.

Panic reigned in both Germany and Italy, since the increased activity of the British air force and navy clearly showed that the British were up to something new in order to finally demoralize the degraded heirs of great Rome.

To complete the campaign, it was necessary to capture Tripoli. However, from Cairo, from

Commander-in-Chief of the British forces in the Middle East, General Wywell, received an order to stop the offensive, regroup forces and wait for further orders.

The new Prime Minister of Greece, Alexander Koryzis, barely took office, openly called for the help of the British. An order followed from London: to immediately suspend the offensive in the western desert, redirecting the main forces of their troops to help Greece.

Historians still regard this decision by Churchill as his biggest strategic mistake during the entire war. They note with irony that the main "fault" of Wywell and O'Connor is that they dealt with the Italians too quickly, making the catastrophe of Mussolini's armed forces too obvious. If they held out with this for another four months, systematically pushing the Italians to Tripoli, Hitler, stuck in the Soviet Union, could not start his African campaign, and the Allies would not have to fight for almost 2 more years to finally establish themselves on the entire African coast from the Atlantic to Suez.

In this bold hypothesis, only one question hangs in the air: would there have been an attack on the Soviet Union at all if Italy had collapsed not in 1943, but in 1941?

Is it possible that Churchill's biggest strategic mistake was deliberate? Churchill was not a man capable of making ill-considered steps, let alone reckless ones.

Alas, history does not tolerate subjunctive moods.

On February 8, General Erwin Rommel was summoned to the Führer.

Hitler received Rommel in the presence of Brauchitsch. The Führer informed the general that he had been appointed commander of a special group consisting of the 5th Light Division and part of the 15th Panzer Division, which were already loading in Genoa for transfer through Tripoli to North Africa to save Italy from total collapse. By the end of May, Rommel was promised to transfer the entire 15th Panzer Division to Africa.

When Rommel flew to Rome on February 11, he already knew that as a result of the bombardment of Genoa by British ships and aircraft, his frail forces allocated by Hitler had been reduced by almost half.

But Rommel did not lose his head, ordering the remnants of the 5th Light Division and all that was left of the 15th Panzer Division to urgently load onto ships and proceed to Tripoli. Follow one at a time, without attracting the attention of the British by convoy.

Having ordered General Geisler to prepare part of the forces for a flight to Africa and immediately begin large-scale operations against the main British supply base in Benghazi, Rommel flew to Tripoli on February 12 in a Junkers transport.

A camouflaged Ju-52 crept over the very water and, slipping under the very nose of the British, safely delivered Rommel to Tripoli on February 12. To his great amazement, Rommel learned that the British had stopped their advance on Tripoli. The 6th shock Australian division was transferred to Greece, the 7th armored division of England was loaded on transport in Alexandria, also heading to Greece. Most of the transport, artillery and anti-aircraft support, ammunition and fuel were also sent there.

The front on the El Agueila-Marada line was occupied by the unfired Australian 9th Division, not at full strength, and the 2nd Reserve Armored Division, planted, for lack of another

materiel, for somehow repaired captured Italian tanks.

With difficulty suppressing his wild joy at such a gift of fate, Rommel began to look forward to the arrival of the first units of the 5th German Light Division, which was already expected on February 14, praying to God that the British would not intercept at sea and drown the single transports coming from such an invaluable cargo from Genoa and Tripoli.

It was on the very day when the squadron of Admiral Somerville, as the embodiment of invincible sea power, smashed the Genoese port, the captain of the 2nd rank Wolfgang Kahler, the senior artillery officer of the battleship Gneisenau, noticed a faint smoke on the horizon from the "crow's nest" on the mast. This was immediately reported to Scharnhorst. The ships of the detachment of Admiral Lutyens have been in the North Atlantic for the 6th day, but have not yet met

nobody.

On February 4, taking advantage of the snow charges and the haze that came from the Arctic, they managed to slip past the English patrol cruiser through the Danish Strait into the Atlantic unnoticed. Addressing the crew, Admiral Lutyens announced with a hint of triumph in his voice: "For the first time in history, it was today that German surface ships managed to break through the English blockade into the Atlantic. More success is ahead of you!"

On February 8, both battleships sailed on the parallel of the southern tip of Greenland, keeping thirty miles apart. A piercing cold wind was blowing, catching up with the oncoming wave that was crashing on the decks. Snowballs flying at times reduced visibility to zero.

The next morning, the wind abated slightly, and the ships began to search for prey. The available information was that convoy HX-105, which left Halifax on January 31, was on a northeasterly course. Nothing was known about the security of the convoy. Lütjens planned to approach the convoy from the south on the Gneisenau, then taking it in pincers with the help of the Scharnhorst, which was supposed to appear from the north.

And at 08:30 on January 9, Captain 2nd Rank Kahler from the Gneisenau crow's nest noticed smoke on the horizon, and then the tips of the masts. The ships continued their approach, breaking through the raging waves, and at 09:47, at a distance of 17 miles, the navigator of the Scharnhorst, Captain 2nd Rank Helmut Gissler, identified the English battleship Remilles.

It was an old low-speed (21 knots) ship built in 1916. He could not get away from the thirty-two knot German battleships and not catch up with them. But the old battleship carried eight fifteen-inch guns and, in the event of a battle, could smash both German ships to shreds.

As soon as the enemy was identified, Lutyens immediately ordered the action to be canceled, mindful of the order that categorically prescribed by all means to avoid combat with English ships and especially with battleships. The crews of the ships were disappointed and annoyed.

Giant waves swept over the battleships, crashing against the main battery towers, bridges and superstructures. Rolling reached 40 degrees, the bow of the ships went into the water along the superstructure. Anti-aircraft guns were damaged and mangled. The waves washed overboard almost all the ventilation rough.

The detachment had been at sea for 17 days, without showing itself in any way. The weather continued to rage and Admiral Lutyens began to think about returning to Brest.

Chapter 14

On February 15, 1941, the XVIII All-Union Conference of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks opened in Moscow, which lasted until February 20. Georgy Malenkov made a report at the party conference. The official topic of the report was the situation in industry and transport. And although the report, as it should be, was delivered in untranslatable "new language", its leitmotif was the demand to bring industry and transport to a state of full mobilization readiness.

"Full mobilization readiness" - this phrase was constantly heard both in the report and in the debate. It was, of course, about enterprises working "for defense", although there were practically no other enterprises left in the Soviet Union.

In a tangle of intrigues into which the entire social, economic and political life of the country was turned, in an orgy of massacres, arrests and denunciations, desperate attempts to find a way out of that deadly impasse into which the country was driven, a squabble between the army and the military industry occupied one of the very first places in terms of ruthlessness and unscrupulousness.

And as always, in the center of the squabble was the father of all peoples himself. Once, in a conversation with his favorite Andrei Zhdanov, Stalin remarked that during the years of the Civil War, he remembers, there was a very good 107-mm field gun. The Red Army soldiers loved her very much. Such a gun was easily transported by horses. Now, if now it would be installed on tanks?

Since it was a field gun from the time of the civil war, it was naturally impossible to install it on a tank. But the idea of the leader was developed creatively. Zhdanov instructed the designers of the Kirov plant in Leningrad to create a 107-mm gun for the tank. Those were horrified. For such a gun, it was necessary to create a completely new tank, and not one that was already going into series. Moreover, an excellent 76-mm gun has already been created for serial tanks. Not to mention the fact that no ammunition has yet been created for this mythical 107-mm cannon.

Zhdanov, meanwhile, had already enlisted the support of Marshal Kulik, who served as head of the Main Artillery Directorate of the Red Army. Having learned who the "creator" of the 107-mm gun was, Kulik immediately gave the order to discontinue the production of the 76-mm gun and start manufacturing Stalin's favorite gun so that it could be installed on new tanks.

Upon learning of this, the People's Commissar for Armaments Boris Vannikov was horrified. He lived in a state of quiet horror all the time, but such stories, horrifying him, made him forget about everything, even about his own safety. Oye flatly refused to carry out the orders of Zhdanov and Kulik. A scandal erupted in which both sides naturally appealed to Stalin - this time not only as the father of all peoples, but also as the creator of a new tool.

For greater persuasiveness, Kulik fabricated a fake intelligence report that the Germans were re-equipping their tanks with a new 100-mm gun, which they did not even think of doing. Vannikov contacted the GRU and received an explanation that the German tanks mainly had 45 and 50 mm short-barreled guns, some had 75 mm.

"It is unlikely," experts pointed out, "that the Germans could provide such a big leap in strengthening tank equipment in a year" ...

Soon Vannikov was summoned to the leader.

He gloomily asked: "What do you say about the proposal to arm tanks with 107-mm

cannon? Comrade Kulik says that you do not agree with him. And the guns are very good, I know them from the Civil War..." By this time, Vannikov himself already knew well where the wind was blowing from. But nevertheless, he found enough courage in himself to explain to Comrade Stalin in the mildest form all the absurdity of his unexpected initiative.

Stalin walked around the office behind Vannikov's back and listened.

At that moment, Zhdanov entered the room.

Seeing him, Stalin reproachfully said:

- Here Vannikov does not want to make 107-mm guns for our Leningrad tanks. Such good guns, but he doesn't want to make them. Why?

- Vannikov always resists everything, - the favorite played along with the "owner". – This is his style of work. And he looked at the People's Commissar for Armaments with a look as if he was saying: "Got it, puppy, who are you going against?"

Vannikov tried to object again, but Stalin abruptly cut him off, saying that he knew all the explanations of the people's commissar: this was a reluctance bordering on sabotage to reorganize to produce new products, which harmed state interests and was pure sabotage.

The People's Commissar for Armaments went cold, deciding that he would be sent straight from the leader's office to the Lubyanka, which was very often practiced.

Stalin, going up to the pale Vannikov, who had hardly risen from his chair on wadded legs, said with a strong Georgian accent:

- It is necessary that you do not interfere. Therefore, instruct the directors of enterprises to immediately stop the production of 45 and 76 mm guns and withdraw from the workshops all equipment that cannot be used for the manufacture of 107 mm guns.

The issue was resolved, but Vannikov did not calm down. At a meeting of the state commission on this issue, he bluntly told Zhdanov: "You allow the disarmament of the army before the war!" He didn't forget it.

They did not forget him that back in 1937 Kulik gave material on Vannikov that allowed him to doubt his boundless devotion to Comrade Stalin, which allowed him, as well as anyone else, to be deleted from life at will. However, Vannikov himself did not remain in debt either and gave such murderous material against Kulik that Kulik had to be shot, and Vannikov himself was honored to die a natural death, having reached the age of sixty-five. Sometimes the leader gave the People's Commissar for Armaments great confidence, informing Vannikov about the upcoming arrests and as if wanting to hear his opinion on this matter. Somehow, in mid-February 1941, Vannikov was honored to have dinner at Stalin's apartment. The leader was gloomy and taciturn, although usually at the table he was very

cheerful and talkative.

"Among the military engineers," Stalin said at last, "there were scoundrels. They will be arrested soon. And he gave Vannikov the list to familiarize himself with. Vannikov looked. His temples pounded. His close colleagues, the most valuable employees, outstanding creators of new weapons were appointed for destruction.

Feeling the leader's gaze on him, the people's commissar silently nodded his head. Stalin took the list, folded it in four and put it in his jacket pocket. He did not show Vannikov another

a list that opened with his own last name. But even without this, Vannikov could understand that if his closest employees were arrested in the near future, the NKVD would receive so many testimonies against him that there could be no doubt about his future fate. But such is the nature of a person who constantly lives under the sword of Damocles, that until the last second he hopes for a better lot. In this case, hope was given by the fact that the leader himself invited the People's Commissar of Arms to his place and showed him great confidence, familiarizing him with the list of the doomed.

Vannikov simply did not know Stalin well.

And who knew him well? Nobody.

Even those closest to him, paralyzed with fear and hypnotized by his will, had little to say to better understand the logic behind his thought process and decision-making. But after all, someone still deftly manipulated these processes? How did it happen that Stalin fully complied with all the points of the scenario of the Second World War, which he allegedly had no idea about? How much - in theory, the Americans should have paid him for his most brilliant saying that

"cybernetics is a Jewish science alien to Marxism", which ensured Americans dominance over the world for the foreseeable future.

What did the campaign he launched give

"in the fight against cosmopolitanism", except for the final formation of the state of Israel and the sharp growth of Jewish capital with the simultaneous destruction of everything that still remained of the international labor movement.

Allen Dulles, attracted by William Donovan to work in American intelligence, even before the official entry of the United States into World War II, wrote an interesting note addressed to President Roosevelt, where he pointed out that the Achilles heel of the Soviet Union was the departure from the official

"international socialism" to

"National Communism" as a more monstrous form of German

"National Socialism". In this case, Dulles pointed out, the Soviet Union would inevitably collapse and disintegrate into a dozen pseudo-independent states. To achieve this, it is only necessary to develop nationalist tendencies in Russia.

How did it happen that Stalin fulfilled almost everything that was mentioned in the note of the first director of the CIA?

There are no answers to these questions. Not yet, because no one has installed them yet. But it is not so difficult to understand them without even looking at the "Special Folders of the Politburo".

Even without assuming any malicious intent, it can be stated with confidence that when a person who does not even have a car license sits at the helm of a huge airliner, which is the state, this will inevitably lead to disaster, which happened.

Time bombs planted under our country, first by Lenin, and then by Comrade Stalin, having worked, smashed the Soviet Union to shreds, and God forbid that they did not smash Russia.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves...

Meanwhile, General Proskurov was transferred to a special prison hospital and treated. Broken ribs and crushed fingers were mended. Doctors were of great concern for broken kidneys. Doctors believed that the former general would last a year and a half at most. And they recommended to the security officers to somewhat reduce the intensity of interrogations, warning that at each interrogation the former head of the GRU could die unexpectedly.

But how could the "intensity of interrogations" be reduced when another powerful military conspiracy was already looming in all its glory with the aim of a coup d'état and restoration of the power of the landlords and capitalists. At the same time, the active assistance of Germany and England was assumed, with which they were going to settle accounts with vast pieces of Soviet territory and the wealth of the country.

The brain of the conspiracy was somewhere in the bowels of the General Staff, from where ominous threads led to the Air Force Directorate, to the People's Commissariat for Armaments, to the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Red Army and, through the latter's agents, to the capitals and residencies of a number of capitalist countries. First of all - Germany, England and Japan. Two investigative departments at Lubyanka worked around the clock, compiling lists of suspects, drawing diagrams and lines of communication, while seeing how sinister threads were woven into an equally sinister web, ready to cover the army and all the plans of the party and government, as it had already happened in the not so back in 1937, when all the global plans of Comrade Stalin were thwarted by conspirators who entangled the country in such a network, from which, it would seem, there was no way out. But Comrade Stalin then found a way out. He will find him now...

"Secret Decree of the Politburo

Special folder dated February 19, 1941

"On the deployment of fronts on the basis of border military districts"

"On the basis of the Leningrad Military District, the Baltic Special Military District, the Western Special Military District and the Kyiv Special Military District, create and deploy fronts and front headquarters From now on, the created fronts will be called

respectively:

1. On the basis of the LVO - Northern Front.

2. On the basis of PBOVO - North-Western Front.

3. On the basis of ZPOVO - Western Front.

4. On the basis of KOVO - South-Western Front ...

11. In connection with the absolute secrecy of this event, the district system is completely preserved and transferred to the deputy front commander for territorial administration, who, after the withdrawal of front troops from the specified territory, enters into full rights of the commander of the rear military district.

Endorsing this decision of the Politburo, Stalin doubtfully told Zhukov: "The confusion is just beginning, these headquarters will quarrel among themselves, to whom to give what orders. There will be no order."

The great leader, as if looking into the water. The idea was too complicated for the clumsy Soviet military machine. "We'll put things in order," the new head of the General

headquarters - there will be order. There is no other way, Comrade Stalin."

Stalin understood that it was impossible otherwise, but he himself was a little frightened by the scope of the undertakings. But I liked how ardently the new chief of the General Staff set to work. And there was very little time left. We had to hurry.

Dekanozov, through his agents in Berlin, obtained remarkable information about the timetable for Germany's preparatory measures for the invasion of Great Britain this summer.

At the same time, it is planned to land several infantry and tank divisions on the coast of North Africa to inflict a decisive defeat on the British and force them out at the first stage beyond the line of the Suez Canal with the capture of Alexandria and Port Said.

In the very near future, German troops intend to strike at Greece with the aim of destroying the British expeditionary forces deployed there and seizing the islands of the Aegean, including Crete, where British bases have been established.

The first German infantry and tank units landed in the Libyan port of Tripoli under the command of the German general von Rommel (as in the text - I.B.), who had already deployed military headquarters in the desert.

Sources in the German Air Ministry emphasize that British intelligence has partially revealed the plan of action of the German command and is in fact openly clinging to the last chance of salvation, which it sees in the poisoning of the Soviet Union and Germany between themselves.

Together with Dekanozov's message, Stalin received a certificate from the General Staff on the examination of a document called the Barbarossa Plan. A thorough study showed that "... this document cannot in any way represent a campaign plan developed by specialists in any General Staff. The plan lacks the general idea of the operation, the schedule of which is literally taken from the ceiling. It is noteworthy that three army groups ("North", "Center" and "South") are going to advance deep into the territory of the USSR in divergent directions, which no strategist could afford. In fact, the "Plan Barbarossa" is a very crude fake and is nothing more than a schedule for the introduction of troops of Kaiser Germany into the territory of the Baltic States, present-day Belarus and Ukraine in 1917-1918. after the collapse of the Eastern Front and the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

With this assessment of the "Plan Barbarossa", the head of the Information Department of the GRU, Lieutenant Colonel Novobranets, did not agree at all. Having received a copy of the document from General Golikov, the lieutenant colonel sat down to study it and came to the conclusion that the plan was not an English or someone else's fabrication. This is a genuine document, and everything indicates that the Germans have already begun to implement it.

"It's like you graduated from more than two academies," Golikov peacefully noted, not wanting to aggravate relations with his stubborn subordinate after Stalin's reaction to "Summary No. 8," and he didn't finish a simple school either. Look how the offensive is planned here: one group is rushing to Leningrad, the second - to Moscow, the third - to Kyiv. And every day they are further and further away from each other. Here, too, an offensive is envisaged from the territory of Romania, but there are no deployed forces at all. The troops are simply in transit through Romanian territory.

Golikov usually beat his subordinate with two "trump cards": the absence of German front-line headquarters on the Soviet border and the lack of winter uniforms among the Germans.

Lieutenant Colonel Rookie, however, had already felt around Warsaw, disguised as some kind of quartermaster's office, for the time being, the headquarters of the army group. Moreover, a few meters from Brest, his agents discovered the headquarters of the tank group, while mothballed.

The second front headquarters was discovered by the Rookie in the Tilsit area. In the same place, like a mushroom on a common mycelium, the headquarters of another tank group crouched down. Both headquarters, of course, led a semi-lethargic existence, so as not to be discovered ahead of time.

Golikov, and with him the leadership of the General Staff, were inclined to think that these were temporary headquarters that controlled the transfer of troops in a southerly direction.

Lieutenant Colonel Rookie, in a special report addressed to the Chief of the General Staff, tried to prove that this was not so. Headquarters are clearly aimed to the east. He realized that this constant and powerful concentration of German troops on the border with the USSR would inevitably disrupt the Thunderstorm and, at best, create an incomprehensible stalemate when both sides would lose even the theoretical possibility of achieving surprise and would be forced to stagnate.

He proposed to strike without waiting for the transfer of the bulk of German troops to the West, which can never be expected at all, but to strike no later than the first days of April, when the German troops would be tied up with operations in Greece. A direct blow through Romania to Yugoslavia (which can and should be made allied) would cut off the German troops stationed in Greece from those stationed in Poland and East Prussia, which will be divided according to the last corrected plan for January 1, 1941.

On the basis of the new data, the recruit drew up another memorandum, proving that at least two of the three front-line headquarters deployed in the west, allegedly for the invasion of England, were fake.

There was no response to this paper. Perhaps Golikov intercepted her on the way. And it is possible that Zhukov read it and, as often happened to him, did not understand anything. The new chief of the General Staff was more fond of oral reports.

But the second "trump ace" Golikov - why the Germans, if they are preparing to attack us, do not stock up on winter uniforms, even Lieutenant Colonel Rookie cannot be beaten could.

I searched for an answer to this question myself, but there was no answer.

"Berlin, February 22, 1941 - 06:25. Moscow, February 22, 1941 - 11:00. Head of the diplomatic mission or his representative personally.

STATE SECRET. TOP SECRET. Must be decoded personally.

No. 353 of 21 February.

In Telegraphic Instruction No. 36, dated January 7th, it was indicated that it was desirable to maintain vagueness in the reports of the number of German troops for some time, and that the full strength of the troops would be reported at the appropriate time. Now that time has come.

There are 680,000 (six hundred and eighty thousand) German troops in combat readiness in Romania. Among them is a very high percentage of technical troops, especially armored forces, with the most modern weapons. In the rear of these troops, in Germany, there are inexhaustible reserves, including regular troops, concentrated on the German-Yugoslav border.

I ask the members of the diplomatic mission and possible confidants to begin in an acceptable way in impressive form to make known this force, indicating that it is more than enough to deal with any contingency in the Balkans from any side, and not only in government circles, but also among interested foreign diplomats. I leave it to your discretion when the exact number given above should not be given. On the contrary, you can also use hints and circumlocutions, such as "almost 700,000", etc.

Ritter.

It is not known who the Germans wanted to scare by spreading such rumors, although, as Soviet intelligence correctly determined, there were no more than 450 thousand of them in Romania. Four armies, 10 separate corps and 12 air divisions of the Kiev Special Military District hanging over the German flanks, already transformed into the Southwestern Front, outnumbered the German group by almost three times in terms of personnel and almost four times in terms of the number of tanks and aircraft.

And if we consider that two more armies were being formed in the North Caucasus for the Southwestern Front, then it is ridiculous to say that the German "leak" frightened someone in the Kremlin. Things have already reached the point that General Kirponos resolutely refused to command such a huge group and bombarded Moscow with projects to divide the Southwestern Front (in order to increase management efficiency) into two fronts: Southwestern and Southern. Zhukov found this idea worthy of discussion. Stalin remained silent, promising to think.

In matters of command and control, Stalin understood little and did not go into them much. Let the General Staff provide a justification - then we will decide.

Stalin was concerned with simpler, but from his point of view, important questions. Covert mobilization, which has been going on uninterruptedly since September 1939, has already brought the army to an unimaginable number in peacetime, approaching 8 million people. In addition to problems in the economic life of the country, which were partially resolved by mass mobilization of women and adolescents into industry and agriculture, mobilization also gave rise to intra-army problems associated with managing such a huge mass of people. In particular, a rather severe shortage of lower-level commanders was revealed. In particular, commanders of platoons, companies and teams. Stalin consulted Timoshenko and Zhukov. The exit was found quickly. The question is, why should an infantry lieutenant study for two whole years, when everything he needs is given to him for the first six months of training?

Indeed, we need to think about transferring land military schools to six-month training. In the meantime, it is necessary to accelerate the release of 2 courses - and into operation!

All the Fuhrer's thoughts were occupied with the diplomatic game in the Balkans to force Bulgaria and Yugoslavia to join the Axis. Both countries clearly did not want this. Especially Bulgaria.

It was easier for Hitler. He could threaten a direct invasion with a preliminary aerial bombardment of Sofia.

However, Comrade Stalin had a lever of influence on the Bulgarians, however, by February 1941, the great leader had already managed to be almost completely disappointed in its effectiveness.

On one of the outskirts of Moscow at that time, near the Exhibition of Agricultural Achievements, in the quiet of a park, there was a solid four-story mansion house built in the late 30s in the architectural style of the "early Stalinist empire". Settled in this house

The Executive Committee of the Comintern, chaired by Georgy Dimitrov, the hero of the Leipzig Trials, which made a splash at the time, was a Bulgarian by birth.

Long gone are the days when noisy congresses of the Comintern were held in German.

No one remembered these times and no one dared to remember.

Comrade Stalin inflicted such a rout on the Comintern, before which all the Bartholomew nights of history faded. Of the once powerful and representative "Russian section of the Comintern", only Kalinin was lucky enough to die in his own bed. With few exceptions, the same fate befell foreigners. As a result, by the mid-1930s, the Comintern had turned into an ordinary division of the NKVD, something in between a department and management, with its own, like every department, specific tasks.

The tasks solved by the executive committee of the Comintern were constantly narrowed, and after the shameful failure of the Spanish adventure, they were reduced to a minimum.

For some time, a propaganda department also worked under the executive committee of the Comintern. One of the most high-profile cases of propagandists was the operation carried out by the German Comintern Maria Osten, who, during a period of particularly bad relations between Stalin and Hitler, brought a ten-year-old German boy Hubert Loste to the USSR from Germany and concocted the sensational at that time book "Hubert in Wonderland", where the German boy did not cease to rejoice violently at everything he saw in the USSR, while cursing everything that he left in his homeland. The preface to this book was written by Georgy Dimitrov himself. This book was read aloud in schools and pioneer houses, on the radio, and excerpts were published in newspapers. The photograph of Hubert himself took pride of place among other "pioneer heroes" next to the photograph of Pavlik Morozov. After the signing of the pact in 1939, the whole operation lost its meaning. The "writer" Maria Osten was shot as a "German spy", and the unfortunate Hubert Loste was sent to the Gulag, where he died.

Almost the same fate awaited the American juvenile delinquent Harry Eisman, who was brought to the USSR just at the moment when the angry American Themis, despite all its democratic nature, wanted to give the youth a full prison term for street robbery and attacking policemen. Harry was carried around the country in triumph, hysterical rallies were held in his honor, where a young fighter against capitalism made fiery speeches.

Finally, everyone got tired of him, was accused of espionage and sent to the Gulag, where he spent seven years. All the Cominternists who organized his delivery to the Union were, out of harm's way, shot ...

Among the unexecuted leaders of the Comintern by the end of February 1941 were Georgy Dimitrov, Joseph Tito and a dozen or two adventurers, whom the leader of all peoples intended to carry in the Thunderstorm convoy and, as he moved to the West, put them on small dictatorial thrones in their respective countries, knowing full well that even on these thrones it will never be too late to shoot them, if necessary.

There was the option of receiving a call for help from the true people's government of Bulgaria, headed, of course, by Comrade Dimitrov and intercepted by radio.

Dimitrov swore to the great leader that he would organize everything. They met quite recently - on February 18, when Stalin called the chairman of the Executive Committee of the Comintern to his dacha. The hospitable leader, although he personally poured kharkho into plates, and "Kakheti" into glasses, listened with doubt on his face. General Zhukov has already managed to enlighten the leader that nothing good can be expected from the proletariat, especially the European one.

The idlers from the Comintern have been fooling us for more than twenty years, and have not been able to organize a single proletarian uprising, on which the entire offensive doctrine of the Red Army was based.

It is necessary, Zhukov pointed out, not to get in touch with these swindlers, but directly with the general staffs, offering them concrete assistance.

Zhukov, using the contacts of the GRU and the NKVD, had already established contact with the general staffs of Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. The Bulgarian military, in the euphoria of "Slavic solidarity," directly told Zhukov that if the Soviet Union had managed to send its troops into Bulgaria before the Germans, there would have been no problems. The army would always convince both the tsar and the prime minister that this was the best way out. The fact that with this "best way out" all of them would have to go straight to the Gulag or stand against the wall, none of them foresaw, and Zhukov's envoys, of course, did not explain. The main thing was different: at this stage, it was not possible to send troops to Bulgaria.

On March 1, 1941, in Vienna, Bulgarian Prime Minister Professor Filov signed an act on the accession of his country to the Tripartite Pact. The signing took place solemnly in the presence of Hitler, who honored the Bulgarian prime minister with a handshake and a few words about the traditional and principled position of Bulgaria in relation to pan-Slavism and other nonsense associated with Slavic solidarity. On the part of the Germans, the agreement was signed by Ribbentrop, on the part of the Italians, Mussolini's son-in-law, Count Ciano.

Before the signature of the Bulgarian professor-premier had dried up, German tanks and motorized infantry moved along the bridges across the Danube.

The Junkers, lined up in a crane wedge, blackened in the Bulgarian sky, roaring their engines low over Sofia, either welcoming a new ally, or making it clear what would await the Bulgarians if they were less accommodating.

On the same day, the German Foreign Office received a telegram from Schulenburg, relayed to the train on which Hitler and Ribbentrop were returning from Vienna.

"No. 444 of February 28. Received March 1, 1941 - 02:10.

Urgently! To telegram No. 403 of 27 February.

I visited Mr. Molotov this evening and carried out Instruction No. 1. Molotov received my message with understandable anxiety and declared: "... the opinion of the Soviet government that Bulgaria is part of the security zone of the USSR remains unchanged."

While the whole world was learning from newspaper reports that the two major European predators were beginning to publicly snarl at each other for the first time over undivided prey, the fact that the new American ambassador, John Wynant, had arrived in London went almost unnoticed. Few people paid attention to the fact that on the platform of the station, contrary to protocol and traditional etiquette, the ambassador was met not even by Churchill, but by the King of Great Britain George VI himself, dressed in military uniform. No one has ever been given such an honor.

The Ambassador informed Churchill that the Lend-Lease Act would be approved by Congress within the next two weeks. Unforeseen accidents are practically excluded. In the near future, the US President's Special Envoy for Lend-Lease, Mr. Harriman, will arrive in England in the rank of envoy.

Some delay in the adoption of the Lend-Lease Act was caused by a fierce debate over one phrase of the law in question, which stated that Lend-Lease could be extended to "any country whose defense the President considers vital to the defense of the United States." As far as the UK, Greece and China were concerned, everything was going well and smoothly. And then, as Winant told Churchill, one of the Republicans asked if such a phrase in the law meant that American assistance could be provided, for example, to the Soviet Union, if the president so decided.

- Why not? Roosevelt shrugged. Republicans and isolationists have thrown a scandal. The congressional chamber was resounded with their far from parliamentary cries. All of America will be horrified even at the mere thought that the American taxpayer can be forced to pay for some of the next adventures of Stalin and his Red Army!

On this issue, the opposition launched a real battle, and some advisers to Roosevelt urged him to agree to a compromise solution that would exclude the Soviet Union. But the President was firm. The Barbarossa plan was in his safe, and he believed that everything would happen exactly as it was written in this plan. And if that happens, the USSR will desperately need American help.

Do you think they'll still get along? Churchill asked the new ambassador, who, unlike his predecessor, the old Joseph Kennedy, was much more resolute and spoke more than was silent.

"At least the president is absolutely sure of it," Wynant replied. "Our guys in Berlin obtained a plan of attack on Stalin signed by Adolf. Bill Donovan claims that some of his guys in Moscow saw a similar plan to attack Germany, signed by Stalin himself. So they will definitely grapple and I would like to save us from an additional headache so that it happens faster and the first move is made in Berlin. Otherwise, both you and we would not have to deal with the red version of Operation Sea Lion.

By this time, the British, of course, also already knew about the Barbarossa plan. The British also knew about Stalin's plans, sealed in red envelopes with the inscription:

"Open upon receipt

Thunderstorm signal. They also knew in London that the "Thunderstorm" signal would follow after the Wehrmacht invaded the English Isles. And although the entire British leadership was well aware that such a landing would never happen, they became more and more convinced every day of the obvious shift in Hitler's strategy against England.

And the intensification of the naval war, and the transfer of troops to North Africa, and the transfer of aviation to Sicily, and the obvious preparation of a strike against Greece - all indicated that Hitler defiantly defines England as the main enemy. But the ports of northern France and Norway and the territories adjacent to them, declared by the Germans a closed zone, were empty. There was no concentration of troops there.

Another incomprehensible phenomenon was noted: German torpedo boats, going at full speed along the English Channel, were actively communicating with some incomprehensible radio station in Le Havre, posing as the headquarters of an army group. Undercover intelligence reported that no army group headquarters was deployed in Le Havre and its environs. What is it: working out the control of landing forces or some kind of another hoax?

"The president is only afraid," the new American ambassador laughed, that Hitler will get stuck in Greece and will not have time to tell Stalin everything he thinks about him this year. As far as we know, you have already assembled a whole expeditionary force of 50 thousand people there. And your

soldiers are famous for the fact that they can defend themselves behind any wooden fence for several years.

"The president is afraid," Wynant went on, that if he gets stuck in Greece, "completely unforeseen events may occur. However, I convey to you the President's opinion. I'm not very good at these things myself. But you know as well as I do that today German troops entered Bulgaria.

The entry of German troops into Bulgaria was not a surprise to anyone, and even more so to Churchill. He had been waiting for this event for a long time, even when he received a message about the invasion of the Italian army in Greece. And since then he has been trying to organize a trap for the Germans in the Balkans.

Churchill planned to forge an alliance of Greece, Yugoslavia and Turkey to resist Hitler, promising immediate assistance from the British air force and navy.

Turkey did not want to interfere in anything, fearing both Germans and Russians equally. Especially Russians. The Soviet troops in Transcaucasia frankly surveyed Turkish territory, conducted reconnaissance of the area, and the nature of their exercises left no doubt where they were going to attack and what their plans were. The unexpected transfer of three Soviet mountain rifle divisions from Transcaucasia to Ukraine, where, as you know, there were no mountains, rather surprised the Turks, but did not calm them down.

Contact with the Germans was no less dangerous. More recently, Churchill sent a special message to Turkish President Inesö, where, in particular, he wrote:

"The rapidly growing threat to Turkey and British interests compels me, Mr. President, to address you directly. The German squadrons only need to fly from their airfields in Romania to the bases being prepared for them in Bulgaria, and they can immediately join the battle. Then ... the Germans will fully control all exits from the Dardanelles and thus achieve the complete encirclement of Turkey in Europe by three sides ... Therefore, I suggest, Mr. President, that we take the same measures for the defense of Turkey that the Germans are taking at Bulgarian airfields..."

The answer from Ankara was more reminiscent of the muffled groan of a seriously ill person who asks for only one thing - to let him die in peace.

With Yugoslavia, things also did not go well. Prince Pavel, the regent of the kingdom, did not want to get involved with anyone at all, making efforts only to preserve the integrity of his state.

On February 14, Cvetkovic and Markovic were called to Hitler's headquarters in Berchtesgaden. Having said a few words about the invincibility of the German army, Hitler made it clear to the Yugoslavs that they had nowhere to go, especially emphasizing the close interaction between Berlin and Moscow. In this regard, Hitler invited Yugoslavia to join the Tripartite Pact, promising in return for an attack on Greece not to transfer its troops through the territory of Yugoslavia, but to use its lines of communication only for the transport of military materials. The ministers returned to Belgrade completely unsure of what to do in the current situation. Joining the Axis powers could cause resentment and revolt in Serbia. War with Germany - split with Croatia.

Nevertheless, Churchill was still trying to forge his illusory alliance.

To be frank, Churchill expected little from the Yugoslav government represented by Regent Pavel, Cvetković and Marković. He hoped that this letter would inspire General Simović, Commander of the Yugoslav Air Force and Acting Chief of the General Staff.

Fifty-nine-year-old General Dusan Simonovich was a participant in the Balkan and the First World War. A deep strategist, the author of a number of theoretical works on military art, he did not consider the position of the Yugoslav army so hopeless.

Yugoslavia could deploy three army groups, seven field armies, 28 infantry, three cavalry divisions and 5 separate special forces brigades, whose operations could support more than 150 tanks and 415 aircraft. These forces, of course, were not enough to defeat the Wehrmacht, but quite enough to give the Germans a decent meeting, especially given the mountainous and difficult terrain.

The militant and valiant Serbs, from whose territory the First World War broke out at one time, did not want to capitulate, and now a conspiracy of patriotic officers was grouped around General Simovic, who preferred death to the shame of surrender and were preparing a rebellion in order to overthrow the government. The plot network extended from Belgrade to the main garrisons in Zagreb, Skopje and Sarajevo.

British and American intelligence services were already operating around Simovich, and Soviet intelligence was already breathing hotly in the back of their heads. Churchill understood well what John Wynant was hinting at.

The Americans proposed to stop the mouse fuss in the Balkans, and to engage in the implementation of truly global plans. When these plans are implemented, Greece, Yugoslavia and Turkey will automatically be in our pocket.

- Ours or yours? Churchill asked.

"I don't see much of a difference," Wynant laughed.

But Churchill, who thought in imperial terms, saw this difference very well. The Great British Empire was itself becoming part of some new and more powerful empire.

Molotov did his best to make it clear to Count von Schulenburg that the Soviet Union was extremely dissatisfied with the entry of German troops into Bulgaria, where Soviet troops were supposed to enter.

"The Soviet government," said Molotov, "repeatedly emphasized to the German government, both during the Berlin negotiations and later, its special interest in Bulgaria.

Consequently, it cannot remain indifferent to the latest German measures and will have to determine its attitude towards them.

Molotov, right in the presence of Schulenburg, wrote the Note with his own hand. It was immediately issued as it should be and handed over to the ambassador.

The note said:

"1. It is regrettable that, despite the warning from the Soviet government contained in the statement of November 25, 1940, the government of the German Empire found it possible to pursue a course that was detrimental to the interests of

security of the USSR, and decided to carry out the military occupation of Bulgaria.

2. Since the Soviet government still holds the positions described in the statement of November 25, the German government must understand that it cannot count on the support of the USSR in relation to its measures in Bulgaria.

Schulenburg skimmed through the memorandum, shrugged his shoulders and again assured Molotov that in this action of the German government there was not even a hint of damage to the security interests of the Soviet Union.

On that they parted.

Even less restrained was Molotov's deputy Andrei Vyshinsky, who received the Bulgarian envoy, who made a similar statement and tried to assure the bloodthirsty prosecutor of the innocence of his country, which acted solely "in the name of maintaining peace in the Balkans."

In his harsh, raspy voice, in which he usually read death sentences, Vyshinsky interrupted the envoy. "On the contrary," he said, "we believe that this will simply expand the area of conflict in the Balkans. How many times have we suggested that you do the same! And you twisted, twirled and twisted. Live now under the Germans!"

The Soviet press was much more restrained. She simply stated what happened, refraining from any comments.

On March 2, 1941, Pravda (on the 4th page) gave three lines under the heading: "Bulgaria's accession to the three-power pact":

"Berlin, March 1 (TASS). The Transocean agency informs that today at 19:45 in Vienna the Bulgarian Prime Minister Filov signed the protocol on Bulgaria's accession to the three-power pact.

On March 3, on the same fourth page, three more lines were published under the heading: "Entry of German troops into Bulgaria":

Berlin, March 2 (TASS). The German Information Bureau reports from Sofia that German troops, with the consent of the Bulgarian government, have entered Bulgarian territory.

The Soviet Union is not happy! Very displeased!

When the Germans, as they promise, withdraw their troops from Bulgaria and Rumania, we will already have the moral right to send our own troops to these countries.

Stalin, on the other hand, is in a very good mood. At the next report, Timoshenko and Zhukov brought him a number of new documents for approval. One can feel the firm hand of the new chief of the General Staff. From the documents themselves blows so offensive

the impulse that this captures all those present and Comrade Stalin himself has to lightly upset his comrades in the military, so that with their dashing they do not break off the traces and turn over the entire state chariot.

Even from the orders of People's Commissar Timoshenko breathed something new. Truly Bolshevik dynamism.

It was not for nothing that the 18th Party Conference gave Comrade Zhukov the greatest honor and confidence by making him a member of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks.

A member of the Central Committee, the chief of the General Staff is not a district commander who, from his command post, is not supposed to see anything further than his trenches. This is already a statesman, and he should think differently, in a stately way.

Comrade Stalin hinted that the army was corrupted by outdated propaganda that the enemy would definitely attack the USSR and then there would be war, otherwise the Soviet people would enjoy eternal peace.

Comrade Zhukov understood the hint: several memos fell on the leader's table, as a result of which Shcherbakov was appointed the new head of the GlavPURA of the Red Army and Comrade Zaporozhets was appointed the head of propaganda and agitation. Together with the General Staff, they edited and brought a document for Stalin's visa.

The document was called:

"On political studies with the Red Army men and junior commanders of the Red Army for the summer period of 1941."

"Many political workers and group leaders of political studies have forgotten Lenin's well-known proposition that "as soon as we are strong enough to defeat all capitalism, we will immediately grab it by the collar."

The following interpretation is sometimes given about just and unjust wars: if a country is the first to attack another and wage an offensive war, then this war is considered unjust. ..

From this it is concluded that the Red Army will supposedly wage only a defensive war, forgetting the truth that any war waged by the Soviet Union will be a JUST war.

And Stalin gladly made an addition: "To work in the troops no later than May 15."

Another document. As soon as Comrade Stalin gently reproached the military for the fact that the training of cadets in land schools takes an unacceptably long time, this disgrace was immediately corrected.

But the nice thing is that the comrades showed a real party initiative and got to the flight schools.

It was order No. 080 of March 3, 1941: "On the establishment of a training system and the procedure for recruiting universities of the Air Force and improving the quality of training for flight and technical staff".

It stated:

In pursuance of the decision of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR and the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks of February 25, 1941:

1. Establish the following training system for flight personnel ... of the Red Army Air Force: ... 2. School of military pilots. Duration of training: in peacetime - 9 months, in wartime - 6 months.

Establish in the schools of military pilots the total flight time per cadet in training and combat aircraft:

a) for bombers - 20 hours,

b) for fighters - 24 hours.

This order can be considered very advanced for its time, if we remember that even the Japanese, in desperate attempts to stop the American offensive, who created the kamikaze corps in October 1944, even allowed their suicide bombers to fly 30 hours of flying time. And this order is dated March 3, 1941. The priority is undoubted, and if you remember that the pilots were first deprived of their officer ranks, and then forced recruitment began in flight schools, then they were forbidden to marry, then we must admit that the Japanese with their "kamikaze" were far from what Comrade Stalin planned in 1941!

Clouds of suicide bombers would appear over Europe, clogging the entire territory of the unfortunate continent with the wreckage of their machines. After all, flight schools did not keep pace with the conveyor production of combat aircraft.

However, the vigorous activity of General Zhukov to turn the country's military schools into high-speed incubators for suicide bombers ran into strong resistance from the People's Commissar of the Navy, Admiral Kuznetsov, who categorically did not want to transfer naval schools to a two-year period in peacetime and a one-year period in wartime. Zhukov absolutely did not understand what it is possible to teach a person for as much as 5 (five) years? Lead ships? A tank, for example, is no worse, but they learn to drive in six months, and if you try, you can teach in 2 months. Naturally, both appealed to Stalin, who also considered the five-year training period for naval officers to be excessive. After all, it is possible to revise the training programs? Why, for example, do schools have so much mathematics? What about astronomy? Well, of course, you need it, no one argues. But why so many?

Admiral Kuznetsov understood that he could not explain anything to these people. And he asked Comrade Stalin to release him from the post of people's commissar. "Don't scare us, Comrade Kuznetsov," Stalin said in a low voice. - When necessary, we will remove you. We'll take pictures without your request."

And he kept his word, as always, but a little later.

And lagged behind with schools. The sailors continued to study in full. Zhukov's proposal to replenish the ranks of officers of the fleet through the promotion of officers of foremen of extra-long service did not pass either. Another proposal did not pass either: to release chief petty officers, not officers, from naval schools. Like in aviation.

This was the first battle between Admiral Kuznetsov and Zhukov.

But Kuznetsov was not the only one who openly rebelled against the rude (whatever it took!) and illiterate

activities of the new Chief of the General Staff. The next was Colonel General Stern, Zhukov's former chief during the fighting at Khalkhin Gol. He was unexpectedly dismissed from the post of commander of the Far Eastern Front and appointed to the post of head of the Red Army Air Defense Directorate, since the previous head, General Kozlov, was transferred to command the district.

Apparently, hurt that his subordinate had taken such a high post, Stern did not hide his negative attitude towards Zhukov, irritably telling how he, Stern, saved the situation at Khalkhin Gol, where without his help Zhukov would have suffered a crushing defeat. As he wrote the report that Zhukov read at a military conference in December last year, which Comrade Stalin liked so much, and much more that invariably accumulates in the soul of the offended and bypassed.

All this, of course, reached Stalin, and he asked Zhukov what his relationship was with Colonel General Stern. Zhukov replied that General Stern, having assumed the post of head of the Air Defense Directorate of the Red Army, considered the Decree of the Council of People's Commissars of January 20, 1941 "On the organization of air defense" and the order of the People's Commissar No. 0015 of February 14 of this year "On the division of the territory of the USSR into zones, regions and air defense points" almost wrecking and is not going to fulfill them. Incidentally, he is supported in this by the head of the Air Force Directorate, Rychagov.

Stalin did not call Stern to himself, but he found out his opinion. Stern believed that such orders and decrees on air defense make the entire territory of the USSR virtually defenseless from air raids by any enemy, whether it be the Luftwaffe about to bomb Kiev, Sevastopol, Minsk or Riga, whether it be the British about to bomb Baku, or the Japanese aiming at Vladivostok and Khabarovsk. The concentration of the main aviation forces at the westernmost border is not justified by any prerequisites, regardless of whether we are going to attack or defend. He was also supported by Rychagov, who had clearly expressed his dissatisfaction lately. The change in the rules for serving in the Air Force and the redrawing of training programs on the go led to a sharply increased accident rate, reaching almost 11% instead of a tolerable three.

"Well, is it possible to forcibly drive someone into aviation?" - Rychagov exclaimed, although at a meeting with Stalin, when this issue was discussed, he was completely (and completely) for, because he quickly understood what exactly Stalin wanted.

Stalin always experienced army squabbles most acutely, even more acutely than in the NKVD. People must work together, rallying around the Central Committee. And they create problems. There is a person - there is a problem. There is no escape from the first part of the most ingenious of the social laws discovered by him. There is no escape from the second...

Stalin's enormous capacity for work and his enormous power were by no means always spent exclusively on solving military, punitive and other issues related to carrying out a misanthropic domestic policy and a predatory foreign one.

There were other questions as well.

For example, it was today that Stalin took the time to look at the documents sent to him from the Department of Socialist Culture under the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks. It was about the permission of the expedition of the Leningrad State Hermitage under the leadership of academician Orbeli to open in Samarkand the tomb of the greatest of the conquerors of the Middle Ages, the legendary Tamerlane. The initiator of this idea was, of course, the NKVD, which had information that countless treasures were immured in the tomb of one of the dreamers of world domination, which is Tamerlane. And Stalin was infected with "treasure hunting" from Lenin, who also knew the Yulka in such matters.

A historical note was attached to the documents, which indicated that there was an old legend, not even a legend, but a kind of belief that goes back to the 14th century and warns anyone who dares to open the grave of Tamerlane that, having done this, he will release himself into his country terrible demon of a bloody and devastating war.

Stalin realized that it was precisely because of this certificate that the documents ended up on his desk. No one could take responsibility for ignoring the historical background. You teach people, you teach, but they remain superstitious, they believe in various women's fairy tales.

The NKVD constantly reported on numerous arrests, especially in remote villages, for spreading absurd, anti-Soviet rumors, implicated in religious prejudices, about the country's approach to some kind of another catastrophe associated with some new invasion, similar to the invasion of Batu Khan. Then a naked maiden will come out of the forest and begin to prophesy before the collective farmers that "great troubles are coming and the fire will swallow the villages and fields"; then a boy in white will appear among the crosses in some cemetery and tears will roll from his clear eyes; then an old man in a shroud with a long gray beard and a staff will appear on the ruins of some demolished church and loudly announce "death, pestilence and famine" for your sins.

Of course, none of these elders and youths could be captured, but those who spread these prophecies received full sentences - up to 10 years in special camps without the right to correspond. Stalin once again re-read the historical reference, grinned, dipped a pen into the inkwell (he did not recognize fountain pens - the old school!) and imposed a resolution: "T. Orbeli! Not later than May, begin work on opening the tomb of Timur in Samarkand. I. Stalin.

As his mother correctly said at their last meeting: "It would be better if you became a priest"! ..

The Soviet embassy in Berlin has repeatedly drawn the attention of the German Foreign Ministry to the fact that there is no bomb shelter at the embassy, and the frequent attacks of British bombers on the city are forcing the embassy personnel, among whom there are women and children, to seek shelter in the nearest metro stations and in temporary air gaps in parks and on the boulevards. The Germans reacted to this problem with understanding, and by the end of February the new bomb shelter was almost ready.

The once brilliant and noisy diplomatic life in Berlin has faded. The embassy mansions, their windows covered with blackout curtains, seemed uninhabited. The big reception, which, according to tradition, the German government arranged for the diplomatic corps on the first day of the New Year, was this time canceled "on the occasion of the war."

Diplomats accredited in Berlin dealt more with each other than with the German Foreign Office, endlessly arranging all sorts of parties, the main purpose of which was to obtain the necessary information, even at the level of mere rumors.

And in the first months of 1941, a great many rumors circulated in Berlin, mainly about the prospects for the further course of the war. When will the invasion of England begin? Will the United States enter the war soon? Will the neutrality of Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey be violated? What are the future plans of the Soviet Union?

The plans of the Soviet Union were of most interest, since almost daily British and American newspapers, with references either to news agencies or to some mysterious sources "close to the Kremlin", published extensive materials about the grandiose military preparations of the USSR on the German border and about the preparation by Stalin sudden attack on Germany. German newspapers diligently reprinted these

materials, and the first secretary of the Soviet embassy, Valentin Berezhkov, was regularly summoned to the Foreign Ministry for explanations, emphasizing that all this overshadows "Soviet-German relations." Berezhkov reasonably replied that the Soviet government could not be held responsible for the provocations of the reactionary, bourgeois publications.

Moscow was extremely alarmed by the hype in the "reactionary bourgeois press", and a strict order flew to Berlin to find out the sources of the leak.

The Soviet embassy in Berlin was frankly doing nothing else but espionage and disinformation. Even business executives regulating economic deliveries were involved in these games, as well as members of various joint commissions and subcommissions, which bred like ants after the signing of the friendship treaty in September 1939.

Rarely in diplomatic practice, the intelligence network in Germany was headed by Ambassador Vladimir Dekanozov himself, a professional Chekist who had long been head of intelligence (Foreign Department) of the NKVD. In Berlin, he led and coordinated the work of both branches of intelligence: both through the NKVD and through the GRU.

The first secretary of the embassy, Valentin Berezhkov, a confidant of Stalin and Molotov, who had the right to report over his head, ate directly to Stalin's apparatus, was also a professional intelligence officer. Graceful and elegant, able to win over at diplomatic receptions, he had a special task of obtaining information in diplomatic circles and spreading the necessary disinformation.

The NKVD residency was headed by the 2nd secretary of the embassy Amayak Kobulov - the brother of the famous deputy Beria - Bogdan Kobulov. In fact, since January 1941, Alexander Korotkoe was considered the second resident at the embassy, who developed feverish semi-legal activities.

The press attache of the embassy, Alexander Smirnov (future USSR ambassador to Iran), was also engaged in intelligence, obtaining very important information surrounded by the German propaganda minister, Dr. Goebbels.

The interests of the GRU were represented by the military attaché, Major General Tupikov, and the naval attaché, Rear Admiral Vorontsov, who had his own intelligence network, no less than the network of the NKVD.

The Gestapo practically did not interfere with the actions of the Soviet residency, which the Moscow embassy turned into. On the contrary, it brought down mountains of disinformation on Stalin's spies.

Ambassador Vladimir Dekanozov himself moved in the highest circles of Nazi society and most often with Reichsmarschall Goering, who received the Soviet plenipotentiary in his estate Karinhall, furnished with medieval luxury. In a spacious office hung with paintings by Renaissance masters, the small, frail Dekanozov in a three-piece suit and the majestic Goering in the uniform of the Reichsmarschall invented especially for him were having a leisurely conversation. Together, against the background of each other, they looked very comical and probably could have made an excellent pop couple, if fate had been at least a little more merciful to both of them.

Showing Dekanozov an American newspaper with a large headline "Stalin's steamroller is preparing to crush Germany," Goering shook his head smiling and remarked that the British and Americans would have given a lot for this to happen in reality. They sleep and see in order to pit the first socialist countries in the world against each other in the name of saving their rotten society and a completely anti-people state

building. In the summer, the Fuhrer is going to put an end to this issue. The day before, the Fuhrer showed Goering a draft directive "On special jurisdiction in the zone of action of the Barbarossa plan, which provides for the release of Wehrmacht military personnel from any criminal liability for robberies and murders of civilians on the territory of the Soviet Union. We are talking about the destruction of ideology," the Fuhrer explained.

And Dekanozov personally took part in the preparation of an extensive document on the extermination and deportation of civilians in the Baltics.

Now Dekanozov told Goering that he personally had always been a supporter of not only a political, but also a military alliance between the USSR and Germany. In a military alliance, he explained, we would be absolutely invincible. It is even hard to imagine what would have happened if the combat potentials of the USSR and Germany had merged into a single military alliance! Isn't that what Kaiser Wilhelm II dreamed about?

Indeed, Goering brightened up, what, in essence, separates us? Just a different interpretation of the concept of "socialism". We are for national socialism, you are for international. You are for the total nationalization of the economy and trade, we prefer to have a multi-structural one. But, my dear ambassador, I assure you and you will see in time that we were right, not you. There is no internationalism in the world. The Jews came up with this, and if they had their own state, they would not be internationalists. And you will inevitably come to the same. You will discard Jewish internationalism and come to Russian nationalism, as we came to German. One people, one Reich, one leader!

Dekanozov himself is Armenian by nationality, i.e. belongs to a national minority that has been persecuted and exterminated for centuries no less than the Jews. Stalin and Beria, Georgians, are also representatives of a national minority who were subjected to genocide from all sides: from the Mongols, and from the Turks, and from the Persians, who lost their independence behind the palisade of Russian bayonets in order to save their nation from total extermination. Meanwhile, the ideas that Dekanozov gleaned from conversations with Goering and other Nazi leaders and forwarded in secret dispatches to Moscow found a lively response in Stalin's heart. Having launched a campaign of Great Russian chauvinism (with obligatory anti-Semitism) in the USSR, Stalin himself was torn apart by complexes of his own national inferiority. He even forbade the Georgian actor Gelovani to play himself in numerous films, saying, to the great surprise of his close associates: "Stalin is a Russian man, and a Russian should play him."

However, Dekanozov was interested in Goering not so much as a socialist theorist, but as the commander-in-chief of the type of armed forces that currently bear the brunt of the war against England on their shoulders. A special gallery was equipped in the estate, where portraits of pilots who laid down their heads in the battle over Britain hung in solemn military mourning decoration. From time to time, during the conversation, adjutants entered the office, clicked their heels, apologized and passed on urgent reports to the Reichsmarschall. It happened that Goering himself, having run through the next paper with his eyes, apologized to Dekanozov and urgently left somewhere.

Yes, Goering admitted, the British turned out to be much stronger than we expected. But their cause is somehow lost. As long as the United States sways, the British will be finished. Their crushing was not easy for us.

At present, we are forced to hold against them, in anticipation of the final blow, practically all the available forces of the Luftwaffe. And if you (here Goering smiled thinly) were really going to attack us, as the newspapers write about it, you would be convinced that in the East we have practically no air connections. There are really a lot of soldiers there, because

there parts of the invasion of England are formed away from the prying eyes of their intelligence.

There is another problem, continued the Reichsmarschall, which I will tell you, Ambassador, solely in the hope of your well-known decency and ability to keep delicate secrets. The war with England is very unpopular with the German people. In all strata of society. After all, we are blood brothers. We relate almost the same way as Russians and Ukrainians. You are the family of the Slavic peoples, and we, the English and the Scandinavians, are the family of the Germanic peoples.

And if today we are talking about the final destruction of England, then please do not think that we are talking about their extermination. Not at all! It is only about their return to the family of Germanic peoples...

While the Soviet ambassador had pleasant, useful and mutually enriching conversations with the leaders of the Third Reich, his subordinates also worked tirelessly.

Valentin Berezhkov was the constant person representing the USSR Embassy at all diplomatic events. All Berlin bohemia was also present, languishing from boredom in the puritanical restrictions of wartime, the charming Olga Chekhova, a movie star from whom all Nazi bosses were thrilled, starting with Hitler himself, who invariably invited the niece of the great classic of Russian literature to all celebrations in the imperial office; aristocratically cold Pola Negri - mistress of the thoughts of the Berlin beau monde; irresistible Willy Forst - the dream of all girls in Germany and many others. But diplomats paid little attention to the beauty of movie stars and operetta divas.

There was a war, and they were in the service, making it their main task to extract more information from each other.

Most of all, Berezhkov liked to talk (by his own admission) with the talkative Turkish ambassador Gerede. Now, after the entry of German troops into Bulgaria, the information of the Turk could be the most valuable, if only to clarify Turkey's position on this issue. Moreover, Gerede himself climbed with information, invariably starting his conversation with the phrase: "I can't guarantee that this is so, but everything can be, and therefore I decided to inform you confidentially ..." At the same time, he treated Berezhkov to Turkish coffee ("such thick," recalls Berezhkov, "that a spoon was almost upright in the cup"), Turkish delight and the famous Izmir liquor.

The Turkish diplomat's favorite topic of conversation was talk of a possible seizure by the Germans of the oil regions of Iraq.

The Japanese ambassador in Berlin, General Hiroshi Oshima, although he was always in civilian clothes, struck Berezhkov with his military bearing and sharp gestures with his right hand when talking. It was like he was constantly slashing someone with a samurai sword.

Oshima, who once served in the Kwantung Army, considered the conflicts that periodically flared up on the border between the Japanese and Soviet armies to be tragic misunderstandings, making it clear that he was a supporter, if not friendly, then at least normal relations with the Soviet Union.

Berezhkov also spoke with US Charge d'Affaires Patterson. At the American embassy, he was looked at with curiosity, but without hostility. It's just that Berezhkov himself did not like to appear there very often, because all the embassy employees, from Patterson himself to the commercial attache Woods, constantly hinted to him that the Soviet Union would be Hitler's next target of attack. Such provocations, in which the echo of American newspapers was heard, infuriated Berezhkov.

He had no right to discuss such things at all, especially with the Americans. His sociability and pleasant smile instantly disappeared, he fell silent like a fish, and took the opportunity to quickly leave.

Moscow demanded an almost verbatim transmission of all dialogues, sometimes even with an indication of intonation. Like everyone else, Berezhkov was ordered not to upload reports with his own opinion, and also to avoid Anglo-American provocations in every possible way and constantly expose them. What he was doing.

No less at ease in Berlin was the Soviet naval attache, Rear Admiral Mikhail Vorontsov.

German sailors never forgot for a minute what they owe to the Soviet Union, which sheltered their most valuable transport vessels in its ports, provided a naval base on the Kola Peninsula, made it possible to use the Northern Sea Route, and for the second year has been providing the German fleet with all the necessary materials .

The information received by Vorontsov clearly indicated that the entire German fleet was fighting against England in the North Sea and the Atlantic. There are plans to deploy forces in the Mediterranean, but so far nothing has actually been achieved. Too little power.

In mid-March 1941, Vorontsov received an invitation from the Chief of Staff of the German Navy, Admiral Schniewind, to come to him.

After saying a few words about the fruitful cooperation between the Soviet and German fleets that had taken place over the past year and a half, Admiral Schniewind admitted that the German fleet was again in need of emergency Soviet assistance and very much hoped to receive it.

Germany is in trouble. This is an acute shortage of transport ships to transport and supply the landed troops. Can the USSR lend Germany two or three dozen dry cargo ships, which are not enough to transfer the second echelon of landing? When transporting the second echelon of the landing force, the risk will already be practically minimal, but it goes without saying that the German government will compensate the Soviet Union for all losses and compensate for all losses, including depreciation.

Admiral Vorontsov assured that he would immediately inform his leadership about the request of the command of the German fleet.

Only on March 15 more or less good news came to Berlin. The first good news was that Rommel's tank transports, taking advantage of the thick fog that prevailed in the central Mediterranean at this time of the year, slipped into Tripoli.

Then came a message from Admiral Lutyens' battleships. They discovered several allied transports that had fallen behind their convoys due to the storm, and delightedly drowned them with artillery fire. The stormy sea made it impossible to do anything to save the crews of the shot ships.

The battleships of Lutyens, descending further south, destroyed several more transports, but were driven away by the approaching English battleship Rodney.

And before that, in the first two weeks of March, all the incoming news was disgusting, frightening and simply tragic.

On March 4, the Yugoslav regent Prince Paul secretly arrived in Berchtesgaden to see Hitler. Hitler stated bluntly: either Yugoslavia joins the Axis, or let it blame itself. prince orally

promised to sign a pact in the near future and was released to Belgrade.

On the same day, a message came about another sortie of the British, who had landed an airborne sabotage group near Narvik. Everything happened so suddenly that the landing did not have time to offer any resistance. Having killed the German guards of the port, the paratroopers blew up and burned down the buildings of factories for the production of the most valuable grades of technical oil, an oil refinery and the equipment of a fish terminal.

Several German and Norwegian cargo ships were sunk, about 300 people were taken prisoner, and more than 400 Norwegian and Polish workers were taken to England, who were forced to work in these factories.

On March 8, a depressing message arrived, which was expected from day to day. The upper house of the US Congress approved the Lend-Lease Act. This event was accompanied by a new, even more militant speech by Roosevelt. "All countries that fight Nazism or will fight against it will receive from the United States everything necessary for this struggle to end victoriously."

And on March 11, terrible news came that shocked both Hitler and all of Germany. In fact, in one battle, while trying to attack another English convoy, three of the most famous underwater aces died at once: Gunter Prien, who once slapped the British with a resounding slap in the face, breaking into Scapa Flow and sinking the battleship Royal Oak; Joachim Schepke and Otto Kretschmer. True, it later turned out that Kretschmer did not die, but was taken prisoner by the British, but this did not make it any easier. All three were holders of the knight's cross, and two of them - Prin and Shepke - were personally handed these crosses by the Fuhrer.

Hitler sat in silence for a long time, his head in his hands. Tears flowed from his eyes.

The answer was devastating raids on Plymouth, Clydeside and Marseyside, in which the Luftwaffe lost 16 vehicles. New young faces in mourning frames smiled from the newspaper pages.

Among other things, a friend of the Duce, who swore that he would soon launch a counteroffensive in Albania, tried to do so on March 9 and was again defeated by the Greeks.

Finally disillusioned with the Italians, Hitler thought more and more about the Japanese. He never forgot for a moment that, by attacking the USSR, he was leaving England and the United States in his rear, which, no doubt, would crush him if he lingered in Russia. If you do the opposite - really take a chance and invade England (even on rafts), then Stalin will immediately crush him, who is just waiting for this.

And if his enemies could be put in two fires? If Japan opened a second front, at least against England and America, and even better - against Stalin.

Ribbentrop, in conversations with General Oshima, no longer hesitated, advised: "You must immediately capture Singapore!"

"But we are not at war with England," the Japanese general bowed politely.

From day to day, the arrival of Japanese Foreign Minister Matsuoka was expected in Berlin, with whom it was decided to discuss the questions of opening a second front against all current and potential opponents of the "new order in Europe and in the world."

By the time Matsuoka arrived, Hitler signed Directive No. 24, which was subtitled "On Cooperation with Japan." The directive stated:

"1. The goal of cooperation based on the "Three Power Pact" should be to encourage Japan to open hostilities in the Far East as soon as possible.

The "Barbarossa" plan, which is being carried out in parallel, will create especially favorable political and military conditions for this.

2. In preparing for such cooperation, the most important thing is to strengthen the combat power of Japan by all means.

To accomplish this task, the commanders-in-chief of all branches of the German armed forces must quickly and fully satisfy all Japanese requests for information related to the German experience of the war, as well as questions of economic and technical assistance ...

In doing so, the following principles should be followed:

A. The general strategic goal must be presented as the rapid conquest of England in order to prevent America from entering the war ...

V. The tremendous successes achieved by Germany in the war against shipping should stimulate the use of powerful Japanese naval forces for such a task ...

d. The provisions of the "Three Power Pact" regarding strategic raw materials suggest that Japan itself must seize the territories rich in raw materials necessary for waging war ...

e. The capture of Singapore - the key position of England in the Far East - will be a decisive success for the combined strategy of the three powers.

On March 17, a message came from the Soviet ambassador to Washington, Umansky, that he had been summoned to Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles, where he was acquainted with the documents of the Barbarossa plan obtained in Berlin by Sam Woods. The Americans were so kind that they even provided photocopies of the materials obtained by Woods.

Stalin ordered Umansky to be summoned to Moscow and, for the first time, explained to him the provocative essence of the Anglo-American policy aimed at inciting distrust and hostility between the USSR and Germany.

By this time, the Soviet military attache in Berlin, Major General Tupikov, through his agents, also obtained fragmentary materials that spoke about the same as Woods's materials.

And, finally, data from Rossler continued to come from Switzerland - additional materials and related developments for the Barbarossa plan. Although Rossler was regarded as a completely unreliable source, or rather provocative, specially created to spread English disinformation, his messages were nevertheless read carefully and taken into account.

On March 20, Stalin called a special meeting to discuss the accumulated information, which was directly opposite in content and direction.

Timoshenko, Zhukov, Shaposhnikov, Beria and Molotov were present at the meeting, and the head of the GRU, General Golikov, and the head of the Directorate of Foreign Intelligence of the newborn NKGB (former INO NKVD) General Fitin and his new head were summoned for the report

Merkulov.

Golikov read out a document obtained by his people and verified by Lieutenant Colonel Rookie, which said:

"Of the most probable military actions planned against the USSR, the following deserve attention:

Option N 3 as of February 1941: "Three army groups are being created for the offensive on the USSR: the 1st group under the command of Field Marshal Bock strikes in the direction of Petrograd; The 2nd group under the command of Field Marshal Rundstedt - in the direction of Moscow, and the 3rd group under the command of Field Marshal Leeb - in the direction of Kyiv. The beginning of the offensive against the USSR is approximately May 20.

According to General Tulikov (March 14), a German major recruited by him said the following verbatim: "We are completely changing our plan. We are heading east, to the USSR. We will take grain, coal, oil from the USSR."

The major believed that the attack on the USSR would take place somewhere between May 15 and June 15.

They also talked about Sorge's message of March 5. He allegedly saw Ribbentrop's telegram to the German ambassador in Tokyo, General Otto, where it was reported that the attack on the USSR would take place in mid-June.

At the mention of Zorga, a sad expression appeared in the eyes of the leader. Is it really impossible to stop the actions of this exposed provocateur? Do something: arrest the family, finally inform the Japanese. The leader's words were taken into account.

General Fitin, who took the floor, reported that the NKGB intelligence had a record of the conversation that took place between our plenipotentiary Comrade Dekanozov and Walter Schellenberg, head of foreign intelligence in the SS-SD system. The conversation took place at one of the receptions, where Comrade Dekanozov was invited not as the plenipotentiary of the USSR, but as a veteran of the NKVD - the Cheka.

At the reception, a relaxed, comradely atmosphere reigned, warmed up by champagne and liqueurs. Taking advantage of the moment, Dekanozov directly asked Schellenberg about the rumors that were circulating about some kind of "Barbarossa" plan, allegedly drawn up to attack the USSR. Schellenberg laughed, said a few flattering words about Soviet intelligence and admitted that such a plan really exists. Moreover, it was compiled by his service even without consulting the military.

When invading England, the factor of surprise is very important. Let the British think that we have changed our plans and relax a little.

We have already thrown this plan to the Americans, because we are sure that they are informing the British. Then he shook his finger at Dekanozov and remarked: we also know something about your Operation Thunder, but we don't take it seriously.

That's what "Thunder" (der Donner) said, not "Thunderstorm" (das Gewitter), although in German these concepts are often confused.

Stalin casts a menacing glance over Beria, Merkulov and Fitin:

"When will this nonsense stop? Finally find out where the information is leaking from? Chekists cringe under the gaze of the great leader. Beria, helping everyone out, calmly says: "I already reported to you, Comrade Stalin, where the leak comes from. And you do not authorize

the activities I suggested. The leak comes from the Directorate of the Air Force, which has already been reported by many, including the NKVD resident in Germany, Kudryavtsev."

Stalin, with a gesture of his hand, ordered Beria to be silent and invited the comrades to return to the issue under discussion, although everyone, having heard about the preparation by the authorities of some event related to the cessation of the "leak", did not feel very comfortable, since everyone was admitted to the information about the operation "Thunderstorm" .

"Events" could affect any of them.

The following were analyzed:

Report from Admiral Vorontsov, Naval Attaché in Berlin, about the Germans' request to put Soviet merchant ships at their disposal to transport the second echelon of landing forces.

A new economic agreement with the USSR until the autumn of 1942, without which the Germans will simply not be able to wage war.

The presence of too small forces on the border with the USSR for an offensive.

The absence of deployed front-line headquarters in the regions bordering the USSR and the presence of such in northern France and Norway.

The leitmotif of the meeting was the conviction that even a psycho would not dare to rush with such frail forces against a powerful multimillion-strong army oversaturated with military equipment.

The meeting was summed up by General Golikov, who read out the following summary:

"1. The intention of the Germans to carry out an invasion of the British Isles no later than the summer of this year can be considered absolutely reliable. By that time, preparations should be completed for carrying out the political and military measures outlined by the Party and the government.

2. Rumors and documents that speak of the inevitability of a war against the USSR this spring must be regarded as disinformation coming from British and ... German intelligence.

After this meeting, an encoded directive flew to all links directly or indirectly subordinate to the Soviet intelligence services:

"ALL DOCUMENTS THAT INDICATE THE NEAR START OF WAR SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS FAKE ORIGINS FROM BRITISH OR EVEN GERMAN SOURCES."

On March 23, 1941, Japanese Foreign Minister Yosuke Matsuoka arrived in Moscow. Matsuoka was on his way to Berlin and Rome, but made a very significant stop in Moscow. The minister was given the highest productional honors, and straight from the station he was taken to the Kremlin, where he was personally received by Stalin.

No one has been honored with such a great honor for a long time.

Stalin received the Japanese minister very cordially.

"We are both Asians," he announced to the envoy of the country of the Rising Sun, "the Soviet Union is mistakenly considered a European country. Few people understand that Russia is the same Asian country as Japan." Matsuoka did not remain in debt. Being a descendant of the most powerful feudal family in Japan, he admitted to Stalin without blinking an eye that

"He is a convinced communist in spirit."

Then Matsuoka began to convince Stalin that the Japanese were fighting in China not at all with the Chinese, but with Anglo-Saxon liberalism, which posed a great danger to Japan, since all Japanese were "communists at heart."

Some time later, while in Rome, Matsuoka explained to the Pope that his country was fighting not against the Chinese, but against Bolshevism, which was supported by the Anglo-Saxons, who, in essence, were also Bolsheviks. This is dangerous for Japan, because everyone there hates Bolshevism, which denies religion and democracy. He does not understand Hitler, admitted Matsuoka, who turned the Anti-Comintern Pact into some kind of laughing stock.

Gradually, the conversation, as it should be in the East, turned into a business channel. We talked about the possible conclusion of a non-aggression and neutrality pact and the liquidation of Japanese concessions in northern Sakhalin. They bargained for a long time, in accordance with the ancient traditions of Asian bazaars, and Stalin gestured to Matsuoka that he - a heartless creature - was simply strangling him. He showed by taking his hands around his throat.

Matsuoka promised to resolve all issues after returning from Berlin, when he, on his way home, will again call in Moscow. He expects to do this around April 8th.

Stalin asked what the Japanese thought to do with the British and Dutch colonies in Southeast Asia, which remained virtually ownerless after the collapse of distant metropolises.

The crushing of England has already been spoken of as if it had already happened. Matsuoka noted that this issue is "very complex and delicate." He knows that the Soviet Union has already negotiated with Hitler about the fate of the "bankrupt British estate" and lays claim to the Persian Gulf area. Japan has nothing against this, but it must be firmly and precisely decided what will go to Japan and what to the USSR. Here we are talking mainly about India, since Japan has no interests to the west of this region.

It has.

Knowing that most of his words would certainly be retold to Hitler, Stalin pretended to fully share the views of the Japanese minister.

Unfortunately, Matsuoka noted, he cannot but draw Mr. Stalin's attention to the completely unconstructive, provocative and simply insulting position taken by the warmongers in Washington towards Germany and Japan. Especially to Japan. They threaten us with trade sanctions, they promise to strangle our economy, freeze our assets, Matsuoka complained.

Now all of Japan is outraged by another American provocation. Roosevelt ordered his fleet to remain permanently in the Hawaiian Islands in order, he said, to play the role of a revolver in the hands of a policeman and stop Japan, which had taken the path of robbery. What right does America have to declare some countries criminal, and consider itself the guardian of order?

Matsuoka admitted that such a frank preparation of America for a war against his country is of great concern to the Japanese government. But, he added, no one doubts that the Americans are capable of forging mountains of ships, aircraft and other weapons, but who will

fight with this weapon? He, Matsuoka, doubts very much that the Americans are capable of this.

Stalin perked up. Approximately the same thing was told to him and his analysts. America is ready to supply weapons in any quantity in order to fight by proxy. But she herself is completely incapable of fighting an exhausting, modern, bloody war. Unable due to strong public opinion and democracy.

In addition, the offended Matsuoka did not let up, we also have something to surprise these cowardly Yankees if they climb to fight.

Stalin knew what the Japanese were talking about. Soviet intelligence has long been reporting on the construction in Japan of some super-powerful battleships, which had no analogue in the United States and no one in the world. The huge Japanese fleet could wait without fear for any provocation by America.

Excited, Matsuoka confessed to Stalin that he hated democracy, which corrupted the people, forcing them to obey their own whims, and not the fulfillment of the national task set by the leaders.

In diplomatic language, a complete "consensus" was reached. The next day, a big reception was given at the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs in honor of the Japanese Minister, and the next morning Matsuoka left for Berlin, very touched by the cordial reception that he received in Moscow.

On March 26, Admiral Lutyens flew to Berlin to report to Admiral Raeder. Four days ago, on March 22, having made his way through a monstrous ten-point storm, Lutyens brought the Scharnhorst and Gneisenau to Brest.

True, Brest was a poor refuge. No sooner had the ships entered the port than an English scout appeared above the base, making several circles and clearly taking aerial photographs. Everyone was anxiously expecting an air raid by the British, but fortunately the weather got worse and worse.

In Berlin and Rome, Raeder reported, Japanese Foreign Minister Matsuoka was arriving. This is the most important event, which will possibly join the Japanese military efforts to the efforts of Germany and Italy in the struggle against England. It is very important now to open a second front against England in the Far East and capture Singapore. Japan is a specific maritime power.

The greatest impression on them can be made by victories at sea, which will encourage them to take action. It is simply necessary that during Matsuoka's stay in Berlin and Rome news should come, if not of a victory, then of some success of the Italian fleet in the Mediterranean.

By order of the Fuhrer, the fleet headquarters prepared a draft order for a new operation of surface ships, which Admiral Lutyens would again have to lead into battle. But this time, the squadron will include the newest battleship Bismarck, which is now in Gotenhafen. Together with the heavy cruiser Prinz Eugen, the battleship will break into the Atlantic through the Danish Strait, where it will connect with the Scharnhorst and Gneisenau that have left Brest. The start of the operation is scheduled for the next period of the new moon, which will be in April. Later, the second battleship of this type, the Tirpitz, will join the Lutyens squadron. The dominance of the English at sea will be ended, and the Atlantic will be completely closed to their navigation.

While the sailors were preparing for new battles under the traditional slogan "God, punish England!", Hitler, preparing to receive the Japanese minister in Berlin, prepared a small surprise. This surprise was the annexation of Yugoslavia to the Axis.

On March 25, Yugoslav Prime Minister Cvetković and Foreign Minister Marković secretly arrived in Vienna. There, in the complete absence of the press and even their own ambassador to Germany, they signed a protocol on the accession of Yugoslavia to the Triple Alliance,

This was the first thing that Ribbentrop reported to Matsuoka upon his arrival in Berlin,

The imperial minister began by reminding Matsuoka and Ambassador Oshima, who was present at the conversation, about the collapse of England. "Germany," he said, "is in the last stage of its struggle against England. During the past winter, the Fuehrer made all the necessary preparations, so that Germany is now quite ready to face England anywhere. The Fuehrer has at his disposal probably the strongest military force that has ever existed." Ribbentrop proudly declared that Germany already had 24 panzer divisions. Matsuoka bowed respectfully. He knew from his own intelligence sources that the USSR had already deployed 40 tank divisions in the western districts alone.

Therefore, the Japanese ambassador dared respectfully inquire: what are the relations between Germany and Russia today?

But this is "confidential only," Ribbentrop warned, saying that "current relations with Russia are correct, although not very friendly. After Molotov's visit, when the Russians were asked to join the three-power pact, Russia set unacceptable conditions. They meant sacrificing Finland, giving Stalin bases in the Dardanelles and the opportunity to exert a strong influence on the situation in the Balkans, especially in Bulgaria.

Matsuoka asked if Germany was afraid that in such a situation, Stalin, in agreement with the British, would strike, taking advantage of some convenient circumstances, say, the departure of large German army forces to the Balkan Peninsula?

"If ever Russia takes a stand," Ribbentrop replied, restraining himself, "that can be interpreted as a threat to Germany, the Fuhrer will crush Russia!

Germany is sure that the campaign against Russia will end with the absolute victory of German weapons and the complete defeat of the Russian army and the Russian state!

The Fuhrer is convinced that in the event of hostilities, the great power of Russia will cease to exist!

Germany is on the alert and will never tolerate the slightest threat from Russia.

Germany wants to conquer England as quickly as possible and not allow anything to prevent her from doing so.

"Therefore, the Führer, on mature reflection," he said, lowering his voice, "came to the conclusion that it would be beneficial if Japan decided to take an active part in the war against England as soon as possible. For example, a lightning attack on Singapore would be a decisive factor in the rapid defeat of England ... Japan, having captured Singapore, will acquire an absolutely dominant position in this part of East Asia. In fact, it will cut the Gordian knot."

It was too much even for the imperturbable Matsuoka. He replied that such an issue required careful study and consultation with the government.

Leaving the German Foreign Office, he remarked to General Oshima: "Why should we capture Singapore if they conquer England in the summer? Singapore itself will fall into our hands?"

"Sorry, Matsuoka-san," the general replied. "I strongly doubt that it will happen the way the minister tried to convince us."

"Why?" the Minister of Foreign Affairs asked.

"Firstly, because they don't have a fleet," General Oshima explained, "and secondly, as soon as they are about to land in England, they will be crushed by a Russian boot right there, like a green caterpillar on a mat. And they understand this very well. So anything is waiting for us ahead of us, except for the landing of the Germans in England."

Matsuoka didn't answer. He thought.

Hitler, like any person with increased nervous excitability, had a very acute sense of impending disaster. Even during a reception in honor of the Japanese Foreign Minister, Hitler realized that something was depressing him. Perhaps he was annoyed by the smiles, the evasive sweetly polite answers, and the idiotic bows of the Japanese. No, there was something else. He saw how his favorite adjutant Sturmbannführer Günsche appeared several times in the hall with some paper in his hand, but, seeing that the Führer was engaged in a lively conversation with the envoys of distant Japan, he did not dare to approach.

Only after seeing off the Japanese, Hitler found out what was the matter: a coup d'état had taken place in Yugoslavia.

The details were already known.

On March 26, when Cvetković and Marković returned from Vienna and it became known that they had signed a pact with Hitler, General Simović started a military mutiny. There was no bloodshed. Several generals were arrested. Cvetković, who was detained by the police, was taken to Simović's headquarters, where he was forced to sign a letter of resignation. As soon as Prince Paul arrived in Belgrade, he was taken to the headquarters of General Simović, where he, along with two other regents, signed the act of renunciation.

To say that Hitler was furious at this news is an understatement.

Later, Hitler himself said that "The Yugoslav putsch was like a bolt from the blue for me. When I was told about it, I thought it was a joke."

The Führer immediately summoned Goering, Keitel, Jodl, Halder and Ribbentrop to his office. By the time they arrived, he had already completely calmed down and said that it was even good that Yugoslavia showed itself that way.

It would be worse if all this happened when the invasion of Greece began, and even worse if the Barbarossa plan was carried out.

Therefore, he decided, without waiting for possible declarations of loyalty from the new government, to make all preparations for the military defeat of Yugoslavia and the destruction of it as a national state.

Hitler's order was issued in the form of Directive No. 25. This violated all previously developed military plans. Operation Marita (the invasion of Greece) had to be almost completely replanned.

Before Hitler had time to recover a little from the Yugoslav surprise, a message arrived about a new defeat of the Italian flag.

On March 27, in accordance with the agreement reached in Meran between Admirals Raeder and Riccardi, a powerful formation of ships of the Italian fleet went to sea.

The newest battleship "Vittorio Veneto" under the flag of Admiral Iachino led 6 heavy cruisers, 2 light cruisers and 14 destroyers. The battleship Vittorio Veneto was the best in the world. Sheathed in 350 mm armor, with a displacement of more than 45,000 tons, the ship carried nine 15-inch guns with a length of 54 calibers and could reach speeds of up to 30 knots. In March 1941, the excellent heavy cruisers of the Pola type surpassed all foreign ships of their class in their combat and technical characteristics,
including the Japanese ones.

Having learned from the intelligence message about the Italians entering the sea, the commander of the English fleet of the Eastern Mediterranean, Admiral Cunningham, went to intercept the enemy, leading under his flag three veterans of the Battle of Jutland - the battleships Warspite, Welliant and Burham. Although the modernization, carried out in the mid-30s, gave the Jutland veterans a modern look, the "old men" were already suffocating at a speed of 22 knots, and their guns, nominally having the same 15-inch caliber as that of the Italian battleship, were much less long-range.

At dawn on March 28, south of Cape Matapan (the southern tip of Greece), the light forces of the British entered into combat contact with the enemy. Regardless of the fact that the heavy guns of the Italians are capable of quickly destroying them all, the British immediately opened heavy fire on the enemy. Huge columns of water, raised by the shells of the Vittorio Veneto, fell on the decks and superstructures of the British cruisers, but there were no hits. At that moment, six biplane torpedo bombers from the aircraft carrier Formidable appeared in the air. Small biplanes, which looked absolutely comical against the background of the camouflaged armored monsters of the fleet of the New Roman Empire, chirping engines at their front speed of 200 km / h, rushed to attack.

The Italians failed to shoot down a single English aircraft, and the battleship Vittorio Veneto received a torpedo in the stern. The ship lost its course and control, water poured into a huge hole. Admiral Yaquino immediately ordered all ships to return to Taranto, which was 420 miles away.

Surrounding the damaged battleship, which managed to raise the speed to 19 knots, the Italian formation, without completing the task, went to the west.

An hour after sunset, it was overtaken by another six Swordfish torpedo bombers.

This time, a handsome man received a torpedo - the heavy cruiser Pola, which, having taken several thousand tons of water, completely lost its course. The Swordfish rushed to their own aircraft carrier, which lit all the deck lights to take the planes on deck.

At that moment, the old veterans of Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham approached the battlefield. Having discovered the Italian detachment by radar, Cunningham's battleships rained down on the enemy the fire of their fifteen-inch guns.

At this time, the beam of an English searchlight hit the heavy cruiser Paul, which was standing idle. The crew, crowded on the forecastle of the wrecked cruiser, was holding out the towing lines to the British.

Admiral Cunningham ordered the Italians to be removed to the destroyers, and the Paula to be finished off with torpedoes, thereby missing the unique opportunity of capturing an enemy heavy cruiser at sea and driving to Alexandria, which would have become the most unique episode of the Second World War at sea. Since the time of Tsushima, when an entire Russian squadron surrendered to the Japanese, nothing like this has ever happened in the 20th century ...

It was the end. The Italian fleet no longer tried to prove its usefulness to anyone.

Huge ships stood in ports until 1943, and then surrendered to the allies in a disciplined manner. Even Hitler no longer reminded Mussolini of anything about his fleet.

The news of the military coup in Yugoslavia caused excitement in the Kremlin. The fact is that Comrade Stalin's policy led to the complete political isolation of the Soviet Union. Hitler had Italy, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and, potentially, Japan, while the USSR had none, except, of course, Mongolia.

No one particularly analyzed even such a seemingly important question: how England and the United States would behave after the start of Operation Thunderstorm. Some were inclined to think that England would automatically become an ally on the basis of the principle "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." Others, and these were the majority, on the contrary, warned that with the beginning of the liberation campaign of the Red Army in Europe, the British would quickly conclude peace with Hitler and act together against the USSR.

But Comrade Stalin could still be intimidated at the beginning of 1940, but not now.

He despised and hated the United States, and how they behaved was decidedly
don't give a damn.

As for the British, they, waging bloody air battles in the south of their country, will not soon come to their senses in order to somehow react to our lightning-fast actions, come to an agreement with the Germans, or, conversely, drown them in the canal, since there will be nowhere for them to go. And on the coast of the English Channel there will be an invincible Red Army.

Therefore, Comrade Stalin was firmly of the opinion that Hitler should not be prevented from completely clearing the continent of the British, so as not to create unnecessary problems for himself in the future.

It is just as dangerous to produce unnecessary allies as it is to produce unnecessary enemies. Some hotheads in the General Staff suggested that, in the wake of the general chaos caused by our offensive, it might be possible to cross the English Channel on the move, capturing the British Isles at the same time. But the leader of such approaches did not approve, considering such views as voluntarism, from which it is already a stone's throw to "dizziness from success." What very
dangerous.

As for Yugoslavia, then, of course, in the end, whether it exists or not was not so important. However, the General Staff calculated the excellent possibility of airlifting large contingents of the Red Army to Yugoslavia. Dagger blows could quickly chop up the entire area, including Italy. Passing the capture of Switzerland promised even greater benefits. Even Lenin believed that the best place to start a world revolution is precisely Switzerland, and by no means Russia. Seven-lingual Switzerland provided such opportunities in theory, not even talking about its banks, which was breathtaking from the opening prospects.

Moscow immediately recognized the government of Simović and with speed, truly unusual, began to draw Yugoslavia into treaty relations.

The German reaction was obvious. Soviet intelligence in Hungary intercepted a message from Hitler to the Hungarian Regent, Admiral Horthy, which clearly stated: "Yugoslavia will be destroyed because it has just openly rejected the policy of understanding with the Axis Powers."

At the same time, Prime Minister Count Teleki received a telegram on the evening of April 2 from his envoy in London, which was also easily obtained by Soviet intelligence. The British Foreign Office officially warned that if Hungary accepted

participation in any German operations against Yugoslavia, she must expect a declaration of war by Great Britain.

The ball dragged on interestingly, and in Moscow it was decided to sharpen the game somewhat.

A treaty of "non-aggression and friendship" was prepared, in which the Soviet Union assumed absolutely no obligations, except for the obligation not to attack Yugoslavia itself.

On April 4, German Ambassador Count Schulenburg was acquainted with the text of the upcoming Soviet-Yugoslav treaty.

On April 5, the Yugoslavs in the Kremlin, where they were met by Stalin and Molotov, offered to prepare a draft treaty in their own version. It was not even a contract, but something like a friendly gesture.

And on the morning of April 6, it became known that German troops invaded Yugoslavia and Greece, and Belgrade was subjected to a merciless air strike, which killed 17,000 civilians.

Dead silence reigned in the Kremlin.

When, on April 6, Schulenburg appeared to Molotov with explanations that "the Yugoslav government, which came to power illegally as a result of the coup on March 27, united with England and Greece" and Germany "had accurate information that the Yugoslav general staff, together with the Greek general staff and command landed in Greece, the British expeditionary army prepared for a joint operation against Germany and Italy," Molotov just sighed.

The Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars and the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the USSR expressed his extreme sadness that, despite all efforts, it was not possible to avoid the expansion of the war. And, apparently, never succeed until it is done with England. Molotov did not mention a single word about the Soviet-Yugoslav friendship treaty signed yesterday, and Schulenburg even more so.

Everything was clear without further ado. At the next attempt to get into European affairs, Stalin received an unequivocal slap from Hitler, but endured it, since it somehow corresponded to his global plans in one way or another.

However, on April 13, Stalin gave Hitler a reciprocal and much more painful slap in the face when a message came from Moscow about the signing of a neutrality treaty between the USSR and Japan, which the cunning Matsuoka, being in Berlin, did not even hint at. Moreover, it was reported that when Matsuoka left home, Stalin personally appeared on the platform, which never happened at all, almost kissed the Japanese, and then hugged the German military attache Colonel Krebs and proclaimed eternal friendship between the USSR and Germany.

Anyone who knew Stalin well should have simply died of fear from such behavior.

Many were well aware of the Stalinist expression that

"he only hugs someone when he can't stab him." Collections of winged Stalinist phrases were no longer stored in one intelligence service.

His joy was understandable.

Unlike Hitler, Stalin solved the problem of war on two fronts. Now he can bring down all his combat power on Europe, i.e. on Hitler.

The betrayal of Japan, on which Hitler counted so much, again unsettled him. The Fuhrer fell into a severe depression, from which even the long-awaited news that General Rommel, having made a 400-mile march through the desert, inflicted the first defeat on the British could not bring him out.

Chapter 15

The parade of troops on Red Square on May 1, 1941 struck all observers with its aggressive orientation.

Even the previous parade on November 7, 1940, specially conceived to impress Berlin before Molotov's visit, did not take place in such a militaristic frenzy. Perhaps the musical accompaniment of this military show was of great importance.

If on November 7 Chopin's music flowed over Red Square, now military brass bands constantly played bravura marches familiar to everyone: "When Comrade Stalin sends us into battle,"

"If there is war tomorrow", "On the roads of acquaintances for the beloved people's commissar". The traditional May Day appeals of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks sounded like a fighting alarm and, most interesting of all, they called for readiness for all sorts of surprises. All this was consonant with the speech of Marshal Timoshenko, who was hosting the parade of the People's Commissar of Defense of the Soviet Union.

"This year," the First Marshal's voice amplified by loudspeakers roared, "the working people of our country and the whole world are celebrating May Day in an exceptionally difficult international situation Therefore, the entire Soviet people, the Red Army and the Navy must be able to mobilization and combat readiness... Comrades! Be vigilant, tirelessly master military affairs, strengthen the economic and military might of our Motherland with tenfold energy in all sectors of socialist construction! Long live the great Stalin! Hooray!"

Tanks crawled across the square. Everyone paid attention to the fact that only the latest T-34 and KV tanks were presented at the parade. Tracked tractors pulled huge artillery pieces of never-before-seen systems behind them. Passed trucks with airborne paratroopers. With bayonets at the ready and in helmets, units of the NKVD passed, minting a step. Armadas of combat aircraft floated in the sky.

The troops were replaced by athletes. Many of them also walked with rifles at the ready or depicted various types of military equipment with their muscular, flexible bodies. Then came the columns of demonstrators, symbolizing the indestructible unity of the party and the people with their whole appearance.

"Great Stalin - Hooray!" - rushed over the area.

"Hooray!" the demonstrators roared back.

Stalin, who stood on the podium of the mausoleum and greeted the jubilant cries with a tired uplift of his hand, could be pleased. It is unlikely that any of those walking along Red Square and enthusiastically shouting "Hurray" did not have one of their relatives arrested, shot, or deported. And yet, with what genuine joy and enthusiasm they rallied

around the leader, ready to follow him wherever he leads, without asking any questions.

From time to time, Stalin stepped behind the members of the Politburo standing on the podium and thoughtfully measured the podium with unhurried steps back and forth. He thought. And there was something.

As expected, Yugoslavia and Greece could not withstand the impact of the powerful forces of the Wehrmacht. There was some hope that the British in the area of Mount Olympus would stop the German advance. But that did not happen. Unexpectedly for everyone, the British began the evacuation of their almost fifty-year-old expeditionary force. They did it, as always, in a very organized manner, with virtually no losses. The British evacuated to Crete, taking with them almost all the ships of the Greek merchant fleet - the fifth in the world.

The German offensive in Greece and Yugoslavia coincided with their offensive in North Africa, where General Rommel had actually driven the British back to the Egyptian border, and General O'Connor, the winner of the Italians, was captured by the Germans.

On the coast of France, German troops, according to intelligence reports, are continuing intensive amphibious landing exercises. The Germans intend to use large forces of airborne troops in the invasion of England, having previously tested their combat capabilities when capturing some large island. Scouts agree that it will be the island of Crete.

The British are clearly alarmed. Throughout April, the British Ambassador Stafford Cripps tried to get a reception from Stalin with some new provocative reports about Germany's plans to attack the USSR. Stalin did not accept him and ordered Molotov not to receive the British ambassador Cripps and the American ambassador Steinhart either. Let Vyshinsky deal with them.

The main thing is that the Germans, with their usual pedantry, are fulfilling their schedule of operations, which we are well aware of, thanks to the excellent work of our intelligence. This means that soon the Germans will launch a major offensive against the British at sea. They follow their schedule and we follow ours.

The conclusion of a neutrality treaty with Japan made it possible to transfer several powerful tank and combined arms formations from the Far East.

The final development of the mobilization plan, which has the name MP-41, and the polishing of Operation Thunderstorm are nearing completion. Stalin ordered that all work be completed no later than May 15. The measures taken in industry since the 18th Party Conference have yielded very positive results. Neither aviation, nor artillery factories, nor ammunition factories let us down. Complete order was restored in transport, and the railroad workers were transferred to martial law and actually poured into the railway troops of the Red Army.

On April 20, according to the testimony of former General Proskurov, the head of the Air Force Directorate, Lieutenant General Rychagov, was arrested.

Stalin has long been suspicious of the too high accident rate in aviation units, which looks very much like sabotage and deliberate sabotage. He repeatedly raised these questions with Rychagov.

At first, he tried to somehow explain this by too intensive flight training programs, poor airfield equipment, improper staffing of flight composition.

And lately he's just started to get rude. To Stalin's last reproach about too

a large number of emergency situations in aviation almost yelled: "You are forcing us to fly on coffins. That's a big accident!" Stalin was even taken aback. Why "on the coffins"? We have excellent aircraft MIGs, Yaks, LAGGs. "Don't talk like that," he said softly to Rychagov. "You shouldn't talk like that."

But even Stalin himself did not expect what was discovered after Rychagov's arrest, when they searched his office safes at the Directorate, at the Air Force Academy, at the Aviation Control Command of the Moscow Region, at the central air defense control panel and, of course, at the apartment and dacha.

Enough evidence was collected to charge the former air force commander with treason. True, the evidence itself did not say anything, but with the help of the testimony of Rychagov himself, they became completely obvious.

Rychagov quickly confessed everything. He recently married the famous pilot Maria Nesterenko, whom he loved very much. Therefore, when asked by investigator Matevosov how much his wife was aware of his criminal activities and whether he wanted a confrontation with her, in which there was a clear threat of arrest and Maria Nesterenko, Rychagov broke down.

He admitted that in a criminal conspiracy with the former General Proskurov, as well as with other generals, mainly aviation, he was preparing a coup d'etat with the aim of killing comrades Stalin, Molotov, Zhdanov and Shcherbakov and restoring the power of landlords and capitalists in the USSR.

Of course, he was asked to name accomplices.

Rychagov was stubborn, but the investigators Rhodes, Shvartsman, Matevosov and Semyonov, assigned to a special team to conduct this most important inquiry of special national importance, were great masters of their craft.

In connection with the special importance of the case, the investigative team was headed, personally taking part in interrogations, by the People's Commissar of State Security Vsevolod Merkulov himself. The case was under the control of the General Commissar of State Security, Beria, who personally reported to Stalin daily.

Almost simultaneously with Rychagov, his main accomplices in the criminal group (conspiracy) were also arrested: the head of the Air Force Academy, Lieutenant General Fyodor Arzhenukhin, Lieutenant General Pyotr Pumpur, Air Force Commander of the Moscow Military District, General Ivan Sacrier, Head of the Armaments Directorate of the Air Force Main Directorate and the most prominent designer of aircraft guns, Yakov Taubin.

Then, exposed by the testimony, the following were captured: the chief of staff of the Air Force Directorate, Major General Volodin, the commander of the Air Force of the Far Eastern Front, Major General Gusev, and Major General of the Technical Troops Kayukov, the head of one of the directorates of the NPO.

The investigation, however, with good reason believed that so far the Chekists had fallen into the hands of, albeit large, but performers. The leadership of the conspiracy, they reasonably believed, was still at large, since it had not been established.

Stalin agreed with his comrades. Interrogations, arrests and searches continued. Replacing each other, the investigators worked around the clock. Stalin even felt better at heart. Just think how the Thunderstorm could end, if it started with so many traitors in the Air Force? Everything could fall apart. It is good that at least at the last moment this nest of the most vile traitors was covered.

However, there was simply no time to think especially about such vile deeds.

First of all, when the Red Army begins its great liberation campaign and the whole world shudders at the mention of the Soviet Union, everyone should know who is at the head of this great country and who sent a great army on the campaign to liberate the working people of the whole world.

Yes, but he, Stalin, was the head of the USSR "de facto", and "de jure" he did not hold any official post at all, being listed as the general secretary of the ruling party.

Now, when no one seemed to dare even a hint to encroach on the absoluteness of his power, he no longer had any reason to shun its official side. Therefore, Stalin decided to remove Molotov from the post of chairman of the Council of People's Commissars and take this post himself. The Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, represented by Mikhail Kalinin, was ordered to prepare an appropriate decree and publish it no later than May 6.

The German ambassador to Moscow, Count Friedrich Werner von Schulenburg, returned from vacation on 30 April. He brought to Berlin a memorandum drawn up jointly with the military attaché, General Koestring. The memorandum stated that since the USSR was in complete political isolation, the expansion of economic relations with it would inevitably lead first to a closer political and then to a military alliance, which was very beneficial for Germany.

On April 28, Hitler summoned Schulenburg to his office. On the Führer's desk lay a memorandum written by Schulenburg and Koestring.

"What are you writing to me here, Count," Hitler asked, "how can I follow your recommendations if Stalin has already decided to attack me?"

Schulenburg was stunned by this beginning of the conversation.

However, having coped with the excitement, the count firmly told Hitler that he did not believe in the possibility of a Russian attack on Germany. On the contrary, everyone in Moscow is alarmed by rumors of an impending German attack on the USSR.

- You do not believe that Stalin can attack us? Hitler asked Schulenburg. "You don't believe me, Count, but I do. I have more information on this subject than you, although it would seem that it should be the other way around.

The Führer led the dumbfounded ambassador to a map showing the famous Bialystok and Lvov balconies, and moving his finger over the blue symbols depicting Soviet tank, infantry and cavalry divisions, artillery regiments and airfields, asked Schulenburg if such a concentration of troops could be qualified otherwise than the strategic concentration on the eve of the invasion?

"Reich Chancellor," Schulenburg tried to object, "I am sure that you are exaggerating the danger. In any case, the war with Russia, whoever starts it, will be a tragedy for both of our countries. While further economic and political cooperation, as I indicated in the memorandum reported to you, will bring incalculable benefits to our country.

- What are you trying to persuade me, Count? Hitler chuckled. "I am not going to attack the USSR. And if I do this, then only if I have no other choice. And so, in principle, I completely agree with you and am ready to help in every possible way to improve relations between us and the Kremlin. "Yes," laughed Hitler, "if there is no way out!"

The illogicality of all the actions of Hitler led Count Schulenburg to despair. He left Berlin the next day, fully convinced that it was his duty to prevent at any cost a future war between Germany and Russia and to create that German-Russian alliance that Bismarck had dreamed of.

Already on May 2, Schulenburg was forced to send a report to the German Foreign Ministry with the following content:

"I and the top officials of my embassy are constantly fighting rumors about an imminent German-Russian military conflict. Please bear in mind that attempts to refute these rumors here in Moscow remain ineffective, if these rumors constantly come here from Germany, and if everyone arriving in Moscow or passing through Moscow not only brings these rumors, but can even confirm them with a reference to the facts.

Schulenburg".

Having received no answer to this message, Count Schulenburg decided to start his own secret negotiations with the Russians in order to prevent the two great powers from "slipping into war".

The Count hesitated, as what he was up to without the sanction of his government bordered on high treason. The only person in the embassy whom Schulenburg could trust was his adviser Gustav Hilger, known to the count for his sharp anti-Nazi views.

It was Hilger who advised Schulenburg to get in touch with one of the Soviet diplomats of about the same rank as he, and talk with him in an informal setting about the possible dangerous development of German-Russian relations.

Hilger knew that Schulenburg's colleague, the Soviet ambassador to Berlin, Vladimir Dekanozov, was currently in Moscow, and advised him to talk to him. In addition to the position of ambassador to Germany, Dekanozov was also Molotov's deputy people's commissar for foreign affairs, and was even close to Stalin himself. At least he will report everything to everyone as it should be.

On May 5, Dekanozov was invited to breakfast in Astafyevo, near Moscow, where the residence of the German ambassador was located in a luxurious mansion, in which, in addition to beautiful antique furniture, he amassed a precious collection of paintings and ancient weapons. In the USSR, all this cost a penny.

From the German side, only Schulenburg himself and, of course, Hilger, who knew Russian very well, were present at the breakfast.

To begin with, Count von Schulenburg said that from childhood he was brought up in the spirit of the unforgettable Bismarck, who always wanted good relations with Russia and warned against any conflicts with her. All the more regrettable for him, continued the German ambassador, that relations between our countries have deteriorated so much that rumors about a possible war between Russia and Germany are already openly circulating. Therefore, realizing the seriousness of the situation, he wants to state the following ...

Here Dekanozov interrupted Schulenburg's speech and inquired on whose behalf the ambassador was going to make a statement? Is he speaking on behalf of his government? Does he have the authority to do so? Otherwise, he will not be able to convey anything to the Soviet leadership.

Schulenburg and Hilger informed Dekanozov that they went on this "sha, unprecedented in the history of diplomacy" on their own initiative and without the knowledge of their leadership.

Before events begin to develop according to the worst scenario, and, moreover, develop automatically, bilateral diplomatic activity should be shown and one more step towards each other should be taken, as was the case in August-September 1939.

Dekanozov asked a clarifying question, who, according to Schulenburg, is the source of such rumors?

Schulenburg replied rather sharply that it did not matter now. But rumors should be considered as fact. Then Hilger intervened, saying that it would be nice if the government of the USSR took some steps to counterbalance their latest statements. And then come up with new initiatives in the spirit of resuming the negotiations that were interrupted in November last year...

The Soviet Union has already exhausted all its initiatives. Any new initiative for rapprochement with Germany would inevitably involve the USSR in the Alliance of three powers and in the war on the side of Germany. This was well understood not only in Moscow, but also in Berlin.

While the Soviet and German ambassadors were having a "secret" meeting at Schulenburg's residence, Comrade Stalin was speaking at a reception given in honor of graduates of the military academies at the Grand Kremlin Palace. Marshals, generals and admirals, officers of all ranks listened with bated breath to the speech.

Congratulating the graduates on their graduation, Stalin spoke about the changes that had taken place in the army during the years that the graduates had spent within the walls of the military academies. "You will return to the army," the leader pointed out, "and you will not recognize it. The Red Army is far from what it was a few years ago.

Further, the leader admitted that 300 divisions are currently deployed in the Red Army, 20 thousands of tanks and "many thousands of aircraft".

"The Red Army," the leader emphasized once again, "is a modern army, and a modern army is an offensive army."

"You will arrive in units from the capital," Stalin addressed the audience. - Will the Red Army soldiers and commanders ask you questions about what is happening now? It is necessary for the commander not only to command, this is not enough. You have to be able to talk to the soldiers. Explain to them what is happening, talk heart to heart with them. Our great commanders have always been closely associated with the soldiers. We must act like Suvorov."

The mention of a tsarist general as an example was completely new. Almost everyone in the audience noticed this original ideological turn. Soon, new posters will come from the combat training department of the Red Army, where it will be inscribed:

"Grandchildren of Suvorov, children of Chapaev! We fight great, prick desperately!

It was the first, so far, microscopic change of course from internationalism to nationalism, indicating that Dekanozov's lengthy dispatches with outlined lectures by Nazi ideologists were not in vain.

And, indeed, who else to cite as an example? Not Tukhachevsky? And who, apart from

Suvorov, so famously attacked neighboring countries and even Italy and Switzerland?

Stalin paused, took a sip of water from a glass, narrowed his eyes, looked around the hushed hall and continued: "In order to prepare well for war, it is not only necessary to have a modern army, but it is necessary to prepare the war politically.

What does it mean to prepare for war politically? To prepare war politically means that every person in the country understands that war is necessary. The peoples of Europe look with hope to the Red Army as a liberating army. Apparently, war with Germany cannot be avoided in the near future, and perhaps the initiative in this matter will come from us. I think it will happen in August. And that's why.

Germany began the war and went into the first period under the slogan of liberation from the yoke of the Treaty of Versailles. This slogan was popular, met with the support and sympathy of all those offended by Versailles. Now the situation has changed. Now the German army is marching with other slogans. She changed the slogans of liberation from Versailles to predatory ones.

Stalin understands that he is talking nonsense. Did the Treaty of Versailles rob Germany of Austria, Czechoslovakia or Poland, which they so gloriously tore in half with Hitler. But he also understood that no one, not only from those sitting in the hall, but in the whole gigantic country, would dare either to say something, or to think differently than the leader commanded.

Then Stalin moves on to the most important issue - to expose the myth of the invincibility of the German army.

"Is the German army really invincible?" - the great leader asks from the rostrum and answers: "No. There are no and never were invincible armies in the world. There are better, good and weak armies."

From the point of view of the military, there is nothing special in the German army in tanks, and in artillery, and in aviation. (Stalin knows better than others that the Red Army has five times more military equipment than the Wehrmacht, and there is nothing to compare the quality at all.)

Military thought is not advancing, military technology is not only lagging behind ours, but Germany in terms of aviation is beginning to overtake England and America.

This is also something new. For the first time in such a positive context, the main strongholds of imperialism, England and America, are mentioned. It turns out that they even have aviation no worse than German.

In conclusion, with noticeable difficulty getting out of the piling of repetitions, Stalin said: "Any politician, any figure who admits a feeling of complacency, may find himself in front of a surprise, as France was in front of a catastrophe." The hint was more than transparent. In the very near future, Germany will face the same catastrophe that befell France last summer.

Congratulating once again all those present on the completion of the course of study and wishing them success, Stalin ended his speech, waiting with a weary look for another stormy ovation from the audience. Then the banquet began.

Toasts to the infantrymen, to the tankers, to the pilots, to the cavalry. Once again for the great leader, dear and wise comrade Stalin!

For the all-conquering cause of Lenin-Stalin! For past and future victories!

And then the head of the Military Academy. Frunze, Lieutenant-General Mikhail Khozin suddenly took and

proposed a toast to the peaceful policy of the Soviet Union. Of course, the general did not come up with this toast himself - he was listed in the nomenclature of toasts at all official celebrations. But the unexpected happened.

Stalin defiantly refused to drink his glass.

The visibly tipsy leader put his glass on the table, spilling the wine on the skatft, and, looking into the dead face of the general with tiger eyes from rage, irritably declared that "it's time to end these defensive calls, because their time has passed. From now on, the Red Army should get used to the idea that the era of peaceful politics has ended and the era of the forcible expansion of the socialist front has begun.

Then Stalin, in simpler terms, repeated what he had already said from the podium:

"War with Germany is inevitable and it is possible that the Red Army will have to take the lead without waiting for a German offensive."

Of course, no one dared to ask the leader any questions.

On the same day, May 5, 1941, unexpectedly for everyone, Hitler arrived on a special train in Gotenhafen to personally inspect the readiness of the new battleship Bismarck to perform a combat mission.

For the first time in eight years, the Fuhrer was not accompanied by Grand Admiral Raeder on such a trip, which in itself spoke of some unusualness of Hitler's visit to one of the main rear bases of the German fleet.

The Fuhrer arrived with a small retinue. He was accompanied by: General Keitel, naval adjutant, captain 1st rank Puttkamer and an official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the headquarters of the Fuhrer Walter Hevel.

At the gangway, the head of state and the leader of the nation were met by Admiral Lutyens and the commander of the battleship, Captain 1st Rank Lindeman. Sailors stood in even rows on the deck, frozen at attention on command.

Then, accompanied by the admiral and the commander, Hitler bypassed the battleship. He lingered for nearly an hour at the forward gunnery control post, listening to the junior gunnery officer explain how a ship's heading and speed, as well as wind direction and air temperature, were entered into the fire control machine. General Keitel, himself a former artilleryman, also listened to this story with genuine interest.

Hitler then retired to Admiral Lutyens in his saloon, taking Puttkamer with him, but leaving Keitel to enjoy the fresh air on deck among the ship's officers.

The events of the war had long since turned Admiral Lutyens into a fatalist. He was convinced that sooner or later he would have to die in some kind of battle with the British, which would certainly be unequal. He shared his thoughts only with his wife, who had a sealed envelope with her husband's will from the last campaign.

From the plan of Admiral Raeder to send a powerful force of battleships and heavy cruisers into the ocean, led by the Bismarck, as Lutyens expected, nothing came of it.

"Tirpitz" was still completely unprepared for a military campaign. Repair of boilers at Scharnhorst

was greatly delayed due to a much larger amount of hard work than planned.

Gneisenau was even less fortunate. The ship was standing against the wall when a five-hundred-kilogram bomb fell next to its side, but, fortunately, did not explode.

This happened as early as April 5, and on the morning of the 6th, English torpedo bombers appeared over the harbor. One of them, slipping low over the pier, rushed to the Gneisenau.

All anti-aircraft weapons of the base fired furiously at the plane, which, having flared up, began to fall apart. But a torpedo jumped out from under the flaming and falling into the water car and hit the Gneisenau in the stern.

From all this it followed that only the heavy cruiser Prinz Eugen could accompany the Bismarck on a campaign, but trouble also happened to him. On April 24, a magnetic mine exploded about 30 meters from the cruiser, damaging the vehicle.

The question arose about canceling the entire operation. Raeder and Lutyens were inclined to this, but Hitler ordered to go to sea, even if the Bismarck was left completely alone.

The Fuhrer specially arrived at the base to make sure the ships were ready and to increase the morale of their crews.

Lutyens, of course, did not share his doubts with the Fuhrer, declaring that he was fully prepared for the task.

"Admiral," said the Fuhrer, "the future of Germany depends on your campaign." The captain of the 1st rank, Puttkamer, who heard these words, understood their meaning much later.

On May 6, Soviet newspapers published the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR appointing Stalin Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars.

Molotov became his deputy, retaining the post of People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs.

Under the heading "We must be prepared for any surprises," the newspapers also noted Stalin's speech yesterday at a reception for graduates of military academies. "In his speech," the newspapers reported, "Comrade Stalin noted the enormous changes that have taken place in the Red Army over the past few years. Stalin spoke for forty minutes and was listened to exclusive attention.

All the intelligence agencies of the world wriggled like snakes to find out what exactly the leader was saying to the military for forty minutes.

No less surprising and mysterious was the decree appointing Stalin the official head of the Soviet government.

Foreign newspapers put forward all sorts of versions, and Count von Schulenburg was firmly convinced that Stalin took this step only in order to personally negotiate with Hitler in the future, who, in addition to the Fuhrer, was also the Reich Chancellor.

On May 7, Schulenburg telegraphed from Moscow:

"...Stalin, having replaced Molotov as Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR, thus headed the government of the Soviet Union ...

I am convinced that Stalin will use his new position to take a personal part in the preservation and development of good relations between the USSR and Germany.

Schulenburg"

It is always dangerous when such an idealistic intellectual as Count von Schulenburg tries to establish relations between two criminal "godfathers".

He was so "sharp" and so "well versed" in the bloody-dirty labyrinths of the Kremlin power that Hitler had every reason to shoot him right in 1941, and not in 1944, as he did.

On May 8 and 9, reports came of heavy German air raids on London, when bombs hit Britain's holy of holies, the House of Commons. Newspapers published a photograph of Winston Churchill standing among the ruins of the Parliamentary Assembly Hall.

On May 10, more than 1,000 German aircraft appeared in several waves over the English capital. They were met in the sky by British fighters equipped with new secret radars for night air combat.

During the April raids, the Germans lost 89 vehicles over London; in the first 10 days of May, the Luftwaffe had already lost 70 vehicles.

Newspaper headlines reported on the famous buildings of the British capital, destroyed by German bombs, about the captured German pilots, about their dead air aces, about the battles in the Middle East, about the uprising in Iraq, where Rashid Ali declared himself the country's prime minister.

However, on May 10, an event occurred, before the sensationalism of which all other news.

On the evening of May 10, 1941, Hitler's deputy Rudolf Hess arrived at the Messerschmitt test airfield in Augsburg.

Starting in the autumn of 1940, Hess expressed a desire to personally test new models of German fighters.

The general aircraft designer wanted to protest, referring to Hitler's catenoric order issued at the beginning of the war, forbidding all leaders of the Nazi Party of Germany to fly aircraft in wartime.

But there was another Hitler's decree, also well known to Messerschmitt, which read: "Deputy Fuhrer Hess receives full authority to make decisions on behalf of the Fuhrer by the Führer Decree." No one could refuse the demands of such a person, including Willy Messerschmitt.

Hess chose to fly a new long-range fighter Me-110.

In no way inferior to professional test pilots in the skill of controlling a fighter, Hess made dozens of takeoffs and landings from the airfield in Augsburg, each time reporting to Messerschmitt and his engineers on the test results, pointing out various shortcomings of the new machine. Hess was especially worried about the insufficient, in his opinion, the range of the new machine.

He suggested that Messerschmitt install additional fuel tanks on the fighter, which could then be dropped during the flight.

Rudolf Hess arrived at the airfield to check how some of the latest changes made to the fighter project by the designers on his recommendation would behave in flight. It was about creating a more advanced model of a night fighter based on the Me-110.

Closing the lantern and starting the engine, Hitler's deputy famously took off from the ground, using only a third of the runway, and disappeared into the approaching twilight. Hess did not return to the airfield.

On May 10, at 22:08, an English air defense post on the north coast near Northumberland noticed a German fighter flying alone. It was strange, because enemy planes had never flown so far to the north.

At 23:07, a new message came from the air defense post, which noticed the lone Messerschmitt. A few minutes ago, the report said, the spotted plane crashed and burned near the village of Eaglesham in Scotland, and the pilot jumped out with a parachute and was detained by civil defense fighters.

The pilot who ejected by parachute was first met by farmer David McLean. The farmer was already going to bed when a huge explosion that thundered in his field made McLean jump out of the house.

On the field, he saw the dying remains of a fallen aircraft, and in the sky - the dome of a descending parachute. McLean had no idea whose plane it was.

The pilot, having extinguished his parachute, removed his helmet and goggles, addressed the farmer in impeccable English. "I'm looking for Lord Hamilton's castle. If I'm not mistaken, this is his estate?"

The farmer replied that this was so, but the lord's castle was still far away and asked the pilot what had happened and who he was. He introduced himself as Adolf Horn and said that he "brought very important news for the Royal Air Force" and asked him to quickly take him to Lord Hamilton's castle.

Finding out that the stranger was German, McLean called the local civil self-defense fighters, and they took the prisoner to the nearest village of Bubsy, where their headquarters was located.

Having locked the pilot in one of the premises of the headquarters and reported this to the authorities, the MPVO fighters considered their duty fulfilled at least until the morning, when the authorities promised to send a car for the prisoner.

But the prisoner suddenly raged, shouting that he was a German officer who had arrived in England on a special mission, and he needed to immediately meet with Lord Hamilton.

All advice to rest until the morning, and "we'll figure it out there," the captured pilot ignored, continuing to loudly repeat his demands.

The self-defense headquarters again reported to the authorities that the detained German officer Adolf Horn, who claims that he had arrived on a special mission, jumping out of a fighter by parachute for this, wants to immediately speak with Lord Hamilton.

The Duke of Hamilton, the most distinguished nobleman of Great Britain, a peer of the empire, who has free access to King George and Prime Minister Churchill, whose family castle was nearby, was extremely surprised that some captured German pilot wanted to tell him something important. For him, and no one else.

Nevertheless, on the morning of May 11, the duke, accompanied by an investigator, arrived at the Maryhill barracks, where the captured pilot was transported.

First of all, the things found with the pilot were examined: a Lake camera, some pills, several photographs, apparently family ones, and business cards in the name of Dr. Karl Haushoffer and his son, Dr. Albrecht Haushoffer. Then, accompanied

duty officer and investigator, the duke entered the room in which they placed prisoner.

Seeing the duke, the prisoner said that he wanted to talk to him face to face. Hamilton asked the officers accompanying him to leave.

Then the German pilot reminded the lord that they had already met at aviation competitions in 1934 and at the Berlin Olympics in 1936. "I don't know if you remember me," he said, "I am Hitler's deputy, Rudolf Hess ..."

Sunday fell on May 11, 1941, and on Sundays - war is not war - Churchill liked to relax. "Otherwise," he said, "it would be impossible to work around the clock all week."

Being in the country castle of his friend in Ditchley, Churchill enjoyed watching a comedy film with the participation of the famous comedians of the Max brothers. At that moment, a secretary approached the Prime Minister of Great Britain and reported that the Duke of Hamilton urgently asked him to phone.

Churchill was surprised. He knew that his friend was in Scotland. What could happen there that couldn't wait until tomorrow morning? The prime minister asks the secretary to tell Hamilton to call in the morning. However, the secretary returns and repeats that the duke insists on talking, emphasizing its extraordinary importance and urgency.

"Winston, you won't believe it," Hamilton shouted into the phone, "Hess has arrived in Scotland." Churchill knew only one Hess - Hitler's deputy, Reich Minister, member of the Supreme Defense Council of the German Empire, member of the Privy Council of the Nazi Party, where he was considered the first person after Hitler. Churchill thought it was fantasy.

Realizing what was happening, he immediately dictated to his secretary the measures to be taken in connection with this sensational event:

- "1. Order that Mr. Hess be handed over as a prisoner of war not to the Ministry of the Interior, but to the Ministry of War.
2. For the time being, place him near London in a conveniently located house, in complete isolation. In the future, everything must be done so that he sets out his views and ideas, while trying to get as much valuable information from him as possible.
3. It is necessary to look after his health and provide him with comfort, food, books, writing materials and the opportunity for rest. It must not have any connection with the outside world or receive visitors, except by persons on the instructions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs."

Apparently Hess was counting on a completely different reception. But no matter what he counted on, he probably did not imagine that, starting from May 10, 1941, he would have to spend 46 years in prison - until his death, which followed on August 17, 1987 in Spandau prison. He also did not know that the mystery connected with his sudden flight from Germany would not only not dissipate after his death, but would become even more overgrown with myths and speculations.

The night before, Hitler's favorite and his personal architect Albert Speer, together with the Fuhrer, worked on a project to rebuild Berlin into the capital of the world. A huge boulevard in the center of the city, with statues of generals installed on it, was supposed to rest against a giant triumphal arch, under which a whole flight of bombers could fly. Hitler made a few minor remarks on the project and asked Speer to come to him on the morning of May 11 with a finalized project, to implement which

It was supposed to be implemented no later than 1950.

Early in the morning with a roll of drawings, Speer arrived in Bergkhov.

In Hitler's waiting room, he found Hess's pale and excited adjutants Leitgen and Pitsch. They asked the architect to let them through first to the Führer, as they should give him an important letter from Hess. Speer, of course, agreed and, while one of the adjutants went into Hitler's office, Speer, unfolding his sketches on the table, began to check how much he managed to take into account all the Führer's remarks.

A terrible, almost animal roar made Speer flinch. Sketches of triumphal arches fell to the floor. Then he heard Hitler shout: "Where is Bormann? Come to me immediately!" Everyone waiting in the waiting room was forced to move to a room on the top floor and locked up there.

Fifteen minutes later, the leaders of the security service arrived in Bergkhov in full force, led by Himmler himself: Heydrich, Schellenberg and Muller.

The consequences were terrible. All Hess employees, from drivers to personal adjutants, were arrested. Having learned that Hess had consulted with astrologers before the flight and, allegedly, they advised him to fly to England, Hitler ordered mass arrests of astrologers, soothsayers, fortune tellers and psychics and strictly forbid them to continue doing anything like that in Germany.

Once interested in these questions, Hitler, after the flight of his deputy to the enemy, became furious at the mere mention of astrology. Himmler was especially upset, who kept three personal astrologers on the staff of the Gestapo and was accustomed not to start a single day without consulting his horoscope. Knowing the weakness of their boss, Heydrich and Müller, with a special sadistic pleasure, brought more and more lists of "astrologers" sent to the concentration camps to the Reichsführer SS for signature.

Hess's wife was declared an accomplice, deprived of all the privileges arising from the high position of her husband, including state support. She was not entitled to any pensions, and only thanks to the participation of Eva Braun, who secretly supplied her friend with money behind Hitler's back, she managed to somehow make ends meet. Hess's father did not survive what happened either, having died suddenly the next day. None of Hitler's entourage reacted to this event in any way, and only Albert Speer sent flowers to the old man's funeral, without indicating, however, that the flowers were from him.

Of course, Muller sent a Gestapo brigade to arrest Willy Messerschmit as the main accomplice in the crime. However, the Gestapo were not allowed to the test site in Augsburg, guarded by the Luftwaffe security service. It turned out that Messerschmit himself had already been arrested on the orders of Goering and sent to him for interrogation. The aircraft designer was delivered to Goering's special saloon car, which stood on one of the tracks of the Munich railway station.

Goering met Messerschmit with undisguised joy.

"I warned the Führer," the Reichsmarshal announced, suppressing a smile, "that these flights of Hess would end up flying to the British. He was not German at all. He is a typical Brit.

Then Goering poked Messerschmit in the stomach with a marshal's baton and yelled:

"You knew that scoundrel very well, Messerschmitt! How could you trust him with a plane? Do you have anyone has the right to fly your fighters? Do you know the Führer's decree on

this account?

Trying to remain calm, Messerschmit explained to Goering that Hess still cannot be considered "anyone." He is Deputy Fuhrer and Reich Minister. According to Hitler's decree, he has the right to order anyone, including himself, Messerschmit.

"Well, you still need to think," Goering lowered his tone a little, "before putting the plane at the disposal of such an idiot as Hess was!"

- If you came to my factory, - the general aircraft designer answered, - and asked me for an aircraft for testing, would you like it if I first turned to the Fuhrer and asked if I could give you this aircraft?

- There is a big difference between me and Hess! Göring yelled again. "I am the Minister of Aviation!"

"And Hess is the Deputy Fuhrer," Messerschmit retorted.

"But you should have seen," Goering persisted, "that he is crazy!"

"How could I suppose," the chief creator of the Luftwaffe combat fighters replied dryly, "that in the Third Reich a madman could hold such high posts?!"

Goering laughed merrily.

"Go home, Messerschmitt, and keep building your planes!"

Meanwhile, SS Brigadeführer Walter Schellenberg, the head of the SD, reported to Hitler what information the British could potentially squeeze out of Hess. First of all, the SS chief of foreign intelligence expressed his confidence that, because of his loyalty to Hitler and the cause of National Socialism, Hess would never betray our strategic plans to the enemy. "Although," Schellenberg added, seeing the doubt on the Führer's face, this is quite acceptable, given his current position.

"As for the upcoming campaign in Russia," continued the head of the SD, "it would be prudent to consider this incident with Hess as a possible warning to the Russians, although it is doubtful that the British, having learned anything from Hess's interrogations, will immediately notify the Russians about this. Apparently, the main goal of Hess was not a betrayal of our goals and plans, but an obsession with reconciling England and Germany.

Heydrich, who then spoke, added that, although he generally agreed with Schellenberg's opinion, he considered it necessary to investigate the role of the British secret service in this matter. In any case, the analysis of the information that Hess possessed says the following:

First, he knew about the plan of the war against Russia, he was her opponent. Being up to his neck in party work and ideology, he did not delve into the details of military plans, did not know any exact dates and the like, which could be of strategic interest to the enemy.

Secondly, being a naive and gullible man, Hess continued to be confident that Operation Sea Lion would be carried out this summer, which caused him additional suffering and, perhaps, with the aim of convincing the British not to go ahead with an invasion of their islands, but to agree to a peace agreement with Germany, he took his more than strange step.

And, thirdly, with regard to the possibility of the British transferring information received from Hess to Moscow, it must be borne in mind that the Russians have long been considering all

information coming from London as disinformation, simply not wanting to even listen to anything coming from the British.

Thus, concluded Heydrich, none of our plans and plans are threatened with serious complications due to the flight of Hess. The main difficulty is seen only in explaining this incident to the allies. Especially Japan, which may decide that we have decided to negotiate with England behind its back. It is equally important to somehow explain this act to Stalin, who, if he is suspicious, may decide that we are abandoning the planned actions against the British metropolis, and will accordingly change¹ our own plans, which is very dangerous, especially now, when preparations for the plan " Barbarossa has entered a decisive phase.

And, finally, Heydrich sighed, everything that happened must somehow be explained to the German people, with whom Hess spoke; much more than all other leaders of the country. Even bigger and tighter than Dr. Goebbels. Unfortunately, we cannot avoid an official statement on this matter.

The official statement was drawn up fairly quickly. It said: "A member of our party, Hess, who, due to a progressive illness that had been going on for many years, the Führer most strictly forbade flying, recently tried - despite the existing prohibition - to take control of the plane again. On May 10, he took off from Augsburg, but has not returned from this flight to this day.

Under such circumstances, the National Socialist movement must, unfortunately, reckon with the fact that a member of our party, Rudolf Hess, was involved in a plane crash and could be killed or fall into the hands of the enemy.

After listening to an official statement, Hitler said that henceforth a special clause would be inserted into the conditions of peace with the British on the extradition of Hess, whom he intended to publicly hang as a traitor.

On May 12, Stalin ordered the embassies of Belgium, Norway, Greece, and Yugoslavia to be closed in Moscow, and their personnel either to leave the country within 48 hours, or to switch to the position of internees. It was a legal recognition of the occupation of these countries by Hitler.

On the same day, the Soviet government officially recognized Rashid Ali's regime in Baghdad. It was a very sharp anti-British move. It can be seen that the accursed British base in Mosul, from which the British threatened to bomb Baku, strongly sat in Stalin's memory. Now the Germans, having occupied Greece and part of the islands of the Aegean Sea, could well reach Iraq in order to provide the rebels with the necessary assistance and finally expel the British from this Arab country. The Germans kept their promises in mind and every day more and more actively sent weapons and instructors to Iraq.

The day before, at a secret meeting of the Politburo, i.e. in the presence of Stalin, Molotov, Beria and Merkulov, who was not a member of the Politburo, the report of the Soviet ambassador in Berlin, Vladimir Dekanozov, was heard.

Summarizing his numerous conversations with Goering, Hess, Schellenberg, Ribbentrop, Weizsäcker and other German leaders, Dekanozov reported that the German leadership almost officially warned him about the measures to mislead the British in 1941.

During these events, rumors of a possible German attack on the Soviet Union would be spread, since large contingents of Wehrmacht forces were withdrawn to the east, beyond the range of British aviation, for rest and reformation. The Soviet government should not react to these rumors, as their main goal is to confuse

and to lull the vigilance of the British and, as far as possible, to ensure the surprise of the landings on the British Isles.

In fact, the German plans provide: in the near future, the island of Crete will be captured by means of air and sea landings, where the tactical methods of landing on the islands of the British metropolis will be finally worked out. Then it is planned to give a decisive battle to the English fleet somewhere in the central part of the Atlantic. At the first stage, for this purpose, in order to test the reaction of the British, a formation led by the newest battleship Tirpitz will be used, and then Bismarck (apparently, Dekanozov mixed up the order. - I.B.). Depending on the reaction of the British in the third stage of the operation, all the available forces of the German fleet will be used for this purpose.

The Soviet government must also understand that the British, for their part, will make every effort to set the USSR and Germany against each other, as evidenced by the campaign that has already begun in the British and American press about the intention of the Soviet Union to launch a surprise attack on Germany.

To this, Stalin thoughtfully said: "Yes, they scare us with the Germans, and they scare the Germans with us."

Dekanozov then repeated the report he had already made to Stalin about his conversation with Schulenburg and Helger.

Sgalin did not listen very carefully. Those present had the impression that Stalin did not hear anything new for himself and that everything Dekanozov said was already known to him through other channels. The leader only briefly remarked: "We will assume that disinformation has already begun at the level of ambassadors."

If Dekanozov's report did not make a particularly strong impression on Stalin, then the news that came on the same day through several intelligence channels about the arrival of Rudolf Hess in England stunned the leader of all peoples no less than Hitler.

Hess was sent to England, of course, by Hitler. Otherwise, it is simply impossible to imagine. What would the world think if Comrade Molotov, having stolen, say, a MIG-3 fighter, flew to Germany and parachuted over Hitler's headquarters? What would he think? That Comrade Molotov is fulfilling the task of the Central Committee, i.e. comrade Stalin. It doesn't happen otherwise. This means that Hitler again decided to offer peace to England and, as a sign of the sincerity of his intentions, sent no one to Churchill, but his first deputy. And not just a deputy, but a deputy in the party. So he's giving up on his plans to invade England this summer? What does he want? He learned about our plans and wants to meet us with all available forces, transferring all his divisions from the canal to the east? There is something to go crazy! Immediately find out with what proposals Hess flew to England. Who sent him? What is the British reaction? What a dirty game!

The leader was genuinely outraged. Beria, Fitin and Golikov saw in the eyes and intonations of the leader that they needed to hurry. Intersecting with each other, ciphers flew into the air. The phone on the desk of Ivan Maisky, the Soviet ambassador to London, was constantly ringing.

All Soviet agents in Germany, in the occupied territories and in neutral countries, began to move.

The official German message that came to the rescue by this time, transmitted without comment by the BDN agency, of course, caused only wry smirks.

Finally, on May 14, the first cipher from London arrived, registered in the NKGB cipher telegram log No. 376.

"OWL. SECRET

Vadim reports from London that:

1. According to Senchen, Hess, upon arriving in England, stated that he intended first of all to turn to Hamilton, an acquaintance of Hess from joint participation in the 1934 air competitions. Hamilton belongs to the so-called Cleveland clique. Hess made his landing near the estate of Hamilton.
2. Hess told Kirkpatrick that he had brought peace proposals with him. The essence of the peace proposals is still unknown to us. (Kirkpatrick is a former Counselor at the British Embassy in Berlin.)

14/U—1941 No. 376".

"Vadim" was a resident in London, Ivan Chichaev, "Nook Alley" was conventionally designated the Foreign Office, the British Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and "Senchen" was the famous Kim Philby, a double agent extradited to the British back in 1940 by Walter Krivitsky and who has since supplied Soviet intelligence so much misinformation that could lead to disaster not just one country, but an entire continent. All conversations with Hess, which the British considered interrogations, and Hess himself and Comrade Stalin - negotiations, were recorded on tape by the British intelligence service, in which Philby served, who transferred all these films to Moscow after some editing.

Philby's next message read (#338):

- "1. Hess did not give any complete information to the British until the evening of May 14.
2. During the conversations of British military intelligence officers with Hess, Hess claimed that he had come to England to conclude a compromise peace, which should stop the increasing exhaustion of both warring countries and prevent the final destruction of the British Empire as a stabilizing force.
3. According to Hess, he continues to be loyal to Hitler.
4. Beaverbrook and Eden visited Hess, but this is refuted by official reports.
5. In a conversation with Kirkpatrick, Hess declared that a war between two northern peoples is a crime ...

"Senchen" believes that now the time for peace negotiations has not yet come, but in the process of the further development of the war, Hess may become the center of intrigues for concluding a compromise peace and will be useful for the peace party in England and for Hitler.

From further messages, Stalin understood the following: Hess never once mentioned the possibility of a German attack on the Soviet Union, and answered the direct questions of the British about such a possibility in the negative. So, to the proposal made by him - "to give Hitler a free hand in Europe", Hess was asked: "Does Hitler consider Russia to be Europe or Asia?", Hess replied: "Asia."

Hess frankly warned the British that a German landing was imminent and England would be destroyed this year if the British did not agree to peace.

There was no agreement from the British.

In any case, such messages were sent by Philby, from which Stalin concluded:

1. The invasion of England will definitely take place.
2. Germany has no plans to attack the USSR. He could be sure of this, since all conversations with Hess were held in an atmosphere of top secrecy and were by no means intended for him, Stalin, disinformation.

It was quite logical, if not for one circumstance.

The British knew that Philby was working for Moscow and, handing over the tapes to him, they perfectly understood that Stalin would believe in their authenticity. That is why they built conversations with Hess in the appropriate way.

Why?

Yes, very simply: in Berlin, and in London, and in Washington, they did not want Stalin to start the next game of the global struggle for world domination first. By common forces, conditions have already been created when the leader of the USSR does not believe in genuine information, considering it disinformation, and considers disinformation to be information. This is the highest art of intelligence.

On May 15, 1941, at 7:30 am Moscow time, a three-engine German transport aircraft Yu-52 appeared from the German border over Bialystok.

Recently, German planes have repeatedly violated the airspace of the USSR, conducting daily visual reconnaissance and aerial photography of areas where Soviet troops are concentrated. Such flights irritated the Soviet command, which was forced to operate at night and spend a lot of time masking all its activities for the deployment of troops in the daytime, that Molotov was forced to send a rather sharp note of protest to the Germans on April 22.

Forwarding this note to Berlin, the Chargé d'Affaires of the German Embassy, Tippelskirch, noted with concern that "serious incidents should probably be expected if German aircraft continue to violate the Soviet border." The incidents that Tippelskirch feared occurred almost daily.

Soviet fighters soared towards the German violators, driving them away from their territory, and one overzealous scout was planted by fighters near Rovno, and his crew was unceremoniously searched.

At the same time, cassettes with aerial photography, maps, records and all equipment for conducting visual and photographic reconnaissance were confiscated.

The Germans calmed down a little, and yesterday, May 14, the German Foreign Ministry instructed Schulenburg with a special telegram just about this.

The cipher read: "I ask you to inform the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs that 71 cases of the mentioned violations of the border by the Germans are being investigated.

Investigations will take some time, as the air force and the aircrew involved must be questioned in person.

I ask you to secure the speedy release by the Soviet government of the plane that made an emergency landing near Rovno on April 15. Ritter.

On the same day, the corresponding paper was sent to the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, where it was emphasized that all overflights of Soviet territory were the result of the indiscipline of individual commanders of units and formations,

alarmed by rumors about the concentration of Soviet troops, about a possible Soviet-German conflict, and therefore undertaking these flights on their own initiative without the knowledge of not only the government, but also the high command.

The Soviet government called for restraint and assured that all those guilty of "unsanctioned violations of the borders of the USSR, after the completion of the investigation, will be severely punished."

It was May 14, and on May 15 a new intruder aircraft appeared early in the morning over Bialystok, continued flying deep into Soviet territory, heading for Minsk. Thousands of eyes followed its flight from the ground, but no attempt was made to interrupt that defiant flight.

After flying over Minsk, Yu-52 continued flying further east, heading towards Smolensk. The weather was beautiful, the sun shone brightly in the blue sky. Everything was quiet and calm. Ground air defense stations, instead of declaring an alarm and starting to direct interceptors at the intruder, contacting the Junkers, corrected its course and height flight.

Having passed Smolensk, the Junkers headed for Moscow and at about half past eleven in the morning entered the air defense zone of the capital of the USSR. Perfectly navigating the complex infrastructure of the outskirts of the giant city, the plane confidently landed on the runway of the Tushino airfield known throughout the country.

Turning around at the very end of the runway, the Junkers shut down its engines just as an elegant black Ford dashed up to it, nickel-plated glass rims, headlights and bumpers sparkling in the sun.

A man got out of the car, dressed despite the heat in a double-breasted suit and a hat, climbed into the plane along the extended elegant metal ladder.

Soon he reappeared, carrying a small (no bigger than a handbag) leather briefcase. The Ford immediately left the airfield and, accompanied by a black Emka, rushed towards Moscow.

Two hours later, having refueled, the Junker took off from the Tushino airfield and, exactly repeating its entire journey in the opposite direction, disappeared into German airspace.

"Dear Mr. Stalin,

I am writing this letter to you at the moment when I have finally come to the conclusion that it is impossible to achieve a lasting peace in Europe, either for us or for future generations, without the final crushing of England and the destruction of her as a state. As you well know, I decided a long time ago to carry out a series of military measures to achieve this goal.

However, the closer the hour of the final battle approaches, the more problems I face. Any war is unpopular among the masses of the German people, and especially the war against England, because the German people consider the English to be a brotherly people, and the war between us is a tragic event. I will not hide the fact that I think the same way and have repeatedly offered peace to England on very humane terms, given the current military situation of the British. However, the insulting responses to my peace proposals and the constant expansion of the geography of hostilities by the British with the obvious desire to draw the whole world into this war convinced me that there was no other way out than to invade the (English) Isles and finally crush this country.

However, British intelligence began to deftly use the position of "brother peoples" for their own purposes, applying this thesis not without success in their propaganda.

Therefore, opposition to my decision to invade the islands embraced many sections of German society, including individual representatives of the highest levels of state and military leadership. You probably already know that one of my deputies, Mr. Hess, I believe in a fit of insanity due to overwork, flew to London in order, as far as I know, to once again encourage the British to common sense, if only by their incredible deed. Judging from the information at my disposal, some of the generals of my army, especially those who have noble relatives in England, descended from the same ancient noble roots, have also embraced similar sentiments.

In this regard, the following circumstance is of particular concern to me.

During the formation of the invasion forces away from the eyes and aircraft of the enemy, as well as in connection with recent operations in the Balkans, a large number of my troops, about 80 divisions, have accumulated along the border with the Soviet Union, which may have given rise to the rumors circulating now about a possible military conflict between us. .

I assure you on the honor of the head of state that this is not the case.

For my part, I also understand that you cannot completely ignore these rumors and have also concentrated a sufficient number of your troops on the border.

In such a situation, I do not at all exclude the possibility of an accidental outbreak of an armed conflict, which, under conditions of such a concentration of troops, can take on very large proportions, when it will be difficult or simply impossible to determine what was its root cause. It will be no less difficult to stop this conflict.

I want to be very frank with you.

I fear that one of my generals will deliberately enter into such a conflict in order to save England from her fate and frustrate my plans.

It's only about one month.

Around June 15-20, I plan to begin a massive transfer of troops to the west from your border.

At the same time, I most convincingly ask you not to succumb to any provocations that may take place on the part of my generals who have forgotten their duty. And, needless to say, try not to give them any reason. If a provocation by any of my generals cannot be avoided, I ask you to show restraint, do not take retaliatory action and immediately report the incident to me through a communication channel known to you. Only in this way will we be able to achieve our common goals, which, I think, we have clearly agreed upon.

I thank you for meeting me halfway in a matter known to you and I ask you to excuse me for the way I chose to deliver this letter to you as soon as possible.

I continue to hope for our meeting in July.

Sincerely yours, Adolf Hitler. May 14, 1941."

While Stalin was enjoying reading a letter from his Berlin friend, Hitler himself

I was less pleased to read the memorandum of the German Foreign Office drawn up by Schnurre's commercial adviser. Thus, Shnurre, who, in the summer of 1939, together with the Soviet attache Astakhov, laid the foundation for such a warm and intimate relationship that had developed by that time, as we have seen, between the leaders of the two countries.

In this document, which was called the "Second Memorandum on German-Soviet Economic Relations", adviser Schnurre reported:

"1. Negotiations with First Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Trade of the USSR Krutikov, which ended a few days ago, were conducted by Krutikov in a very constructive spirit.

2. As in the past, difficulties arose in connection with the fulfillment of German obligations for deliveries to the USSR, especially in the field of armaments. We will continue to be unable to meet delivery deadlines. However, the failure of Germany to fulfill its obligations will begin to affect only after August 1941, since until then Russia is obliged to make deliveries in advance.

3. Great difficulties have been created by endless rumors about an imminent German-Russian clash. Official sources are largely responsible for the persistence of these rumors. These rumors are causing serious concern to the German industry, which is trying to refuse to make deals with Russia and in some cases is already refusing to send personnel to Russia to fulfill contracts.

4. I have the impression that we could present economic demands to Moscow, even going beyond the scope of the agreement of January 10, 1941, demands that could meet the German needs for products and raw materials within the limits greater than stipulated by the agreement ...

Advisor to Schnurre. May 15, 1941"

On May 16 both Moscow and Berlin breathed a sigh of relief. And took a breath.

Numerous intelligence reports set the date for the German attack on May 15th.

In Berlin, after the hooligan trick of Rudolf Hess, there was information that Stalin, who had lost his patience and, realizing how he was being fooled, would give the order to attack. Moreover, German intelligence determined May 15 as the date for the final preparation of the Red Army for delivering a long-planned strike.

Everyone seemed to be right, but nothing happened.

On May 10, 12, 13 and 14, Stalin held secret meetings with Timoshenko and Zhukov, honing the final details of the mobilization plan and its main offspring, Operation Thunderstorm.

On May 16, the plan was presented in its final version. Its conditional name MP-41 was approved on February 12, 1941, when General Zhukov, having assumed the post of Chief of the General Staff, introduced him to Comrade Stalin.

The implementation of this plan, both in the center and in the field, was supposed to be completed by July 1, 1941. The calendar work plan was approved by Zhukov on February 19, 1941, and instructions on the procedure, development and maintenance of the plan were given to the fronts (districts) in early March.

In its final form, the MP-41 mobilization plan provided for the deployment of the USSR Armed Forces as part of the 303rd divisions, not counting the NKVD troops, separate

airborne units and special forces units.

In his speech on May 5, Comrade Stalin boasted to the graduates of the military academies that the Red Army already had 300 divisions.

Now he was pleased to know that he was wrong.

The divisions are no longer 300, but 306, and in the near future their number will be increased to 309. By August 1941, the estimated number of divisions will be 344. Of these, currently deployed: 200 rifle divisions, 61 tank divisions, 31 motorized divisions, 13 cavalry divisions, 348 air regiments, 5 airborne corps with independent controls, 10 separate anti-tank artillery brigades of the RGK, 94 corps artillery regiments, 72 artillery regiments of the RGK.

Not counting the troops of the NKVD, the size of the army had already exceeded 8 million people and was supposed to reach 8.9 million people by July 1. The number of tanks by July 1 was supposed to be about 37 thousand units (by now there were already 27.5 thousand). The number of aircraft of all types has already reached 32,628, of which 22,171 were combat vehicles. The troops already had more than 106 thousand artillery and mortar barrels of various calibers. More than 75% of the total number of armed forces was deployed on the Western border in two strategic echelons. The formation of the third strategic echelon has also begun.

On May 13, Zhukov ordered the deployment of 5 armies of the second strategic echelon. By this order, the 22nd (General F.A. Ershakov), the 21st (General V.F. Gerasimenko) and the 19th (General I.S. Konev) armies began to move out of the Ural, Volga and North Caucasian military districts on the border of the rivers Western Dvina and Dnieper. At the same time, the 16th Army of General M.F. Lukin and the 20th Army of General F.N. Remezov were sent to the South-Western Front (Kiev Special Military District), where they were supposed to form the reserve of the High Command. All these armies and the units attached to them were to deploy on the lines indicated by him in the period from June 1 to July 3.

On May 14, People's Commissar of Defense Timoshenko ordered the early release of cadets from military schools and their immediate deployment to the troops. On May 15, Zhukov submitted to Stalin a draft decree on additional conscription into the army of 800,000 reserve men under the guise of training camps, relegating this event to the end of May - the beginning of June.

On May 16, 1941, the plan for Operation Thunderstorm was finally approved, edited and presented to Stalin on May 15. It was this plan, stored in red sealed envelopes with the inscription "Open upon receipt of the Thunderstorm signal," that gave the semi-official name to this operation. Officially, as is usual in Soviet office work, the document was designated as the "Plan for the strategic deployment of the forces of the Soviet Union in the event of a war with Germany and its allies." The plan was drawn up under the leadership of Zhukov by Generals Vasilevsky and Vatutin. It was labeled "Top Secret" and "Personally Only" and addressed directly to Comrade Stalin, Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR, indicating that this copy was the only one before it was approved.

Unlike the previous ones, this last version of the "Thunderstorm", according to which it was supposed to act, was drawn up, firstly, taking into account the implementation of the Mobilization Plan (MP-41) and, secondly, it completely lacked "new speech" and no one unnecessary preambles like: "If the Soviet Union is attacked..." etc.

All formulations were simple, clear and unambiguous. They clearly trace Stalin's last instructions that "it's time to put an end to these defensive appeals."

The preamble to the plan and design stated that

“To ensure its implementation, it is necessary to carry out the following measures in advance, without which it is impossible to launch a surprise attack on the enemy both from the air and on the ground:

1. Conduct a covert mobilization of troops under the guise of reserve training camps - 80% completed.
2. Under the guise of leaving for the camps, make a hidden concentration of troops closer to the western border, first of all, concentrate all the armies of the reserve of the High Command - performed.
3. Secretly concentrate aviation from remote districts on field airfields and immediately begin the deployment of aviation rear services - 75% completed.
4. Gradually, under the guise of training camps and rear exercises, to deploy the rear and the hospital base is being carried out.

“The first strategic goal of the actions of the Red Army troops,” the plan further said, “is to defeat the main forces of the German army deployed south of the Brest-Demblin line ... center and northern wing of the German front and seize the territory of former Poland and East Prussia.

The immediate task is to defeat the German army east of the Vistula River and in the Krakow direction, for which:

- a) deliver the main blow by the forces of the Southwestern Front in the direction of Krakow, Katowice, cutting off Germany from the allies;
- b) deliver an auxiliary strike by the left wing of the Western Front in the direction of Sedlec, Demblin, with the aim of pinning down the Warsaw grouping and capturing Warsaw, as well as assisting the Southwestern Front in defeating the enemy's Lublin grouping;
- c) to conduct an active defense against Finland, Hungary and Romania and be ready to strike against Romania if the situation is favorable ...

III. Based on the above strategic deployment plan, the following grouping of the USSR Armed Forces is envisaged:

1. The ground forces of the Red Army, consisting of 198 rifle divisions, 61 rifle divisions, 13 cd - a total of 303 divisions and 74 artillery regiments of the RGK, should be distributed as follows:

a) the main forces, consisting of 163 rifle divisions, 58 infantry divisions, 30 infantry divisions and 7 infantry divisions (258 divisions in total) and 53 artillery regiments of the RGK, should be in the West, ..

b) the rest of the forces, consisting of 35th rifle division, 3rd division, 1st division, 6th division (total 45 divisions) and 21 artillery regiments of the RGK are assigned to defend the Far Eastern, southern and northern borders of the USSR...

IV. The composition and tasks of the fronts deployed in the West (map 1: 1.000.000).

Northern Front (LVO) - 3 armies, consisting of 15 rifle, 4 tank and 2 motorized divisions, and a total of 21 divisions, 18 regiments of aviation and the Northern Navy ...

Northwestern Front - 3 armies, consisting of 17 rifle divisions, 4 tank, 2

motorized divisions, and only 23 divisions and 13 aviation regiments ... launch an offensive in the direction of Tilsit-Königsberg, while covering the Riga and Vilna directions with stubborn defense ...

Western Front - 4 armies, consisting of 31 rifle, 8 tank, 4 motorized and 2 cavalry divisions, and a total of 45 divisions and 21 aviation regiments. Tasks: with the transition of the army of the Southwestern Front to the offensive, a blow from the left wing of the front in the general direction to Warsaw and Sedlec-Radom, break up the Warsaw grouping and capture Warsaw; in cooperation with the Southwestern Front, defeat the enemy's Lublin-Radom grouping, reach the Vistula River and capture the city of Radom with mobile units. The right wing of the front, interacting with the troops of the North-Western Front, cut off the main enemy forces from East Prussia and force the Vistula in its lower reaches. Do not cross the Danish border without special orders ...

The document was signed by Timoshenko and Zhukov.

The enemy forces in this regard were estimated as follows.

To date, it was stated in the plan, 86 infantry, 13 tank, 12 motorized and 1 cavalry divisions are concentrated on the borders of the Soviet Union, and in total up to 120 divisions. In the course of our offensive, the Germans and their allies could potentially bring this number up to 180 divisions. However, most likely, the main forces of the German army, consisting of 76 infantry, 11 tank, 8 motorized, 2 cavalry and 5 air divisions, and in total up to 100 divisions, will be deployed south of the Brest-Demblin line to strike in the direction of Kovel-Rovno-Kiev .

To prevent this, the plan considered it necessary "in no case to give the German command the initiative to act, to preempt the enemy in deployment and attack the German army at a time when it will be in the deployment stage and will not have time to organize the front and the interaction of the military branches."

The data on the enemy in the plan were given so intricately that Stalin even took his pipe out of his mouth and asked Zhukov: "How many Germans now have a total of divisions on our border?" The Chief of the General Staff took out General Golikov's certificates from the folder and reported that on May 5, 1941, the Germans were holding approximately 107 divisions on the border with the USSR, including 6 divisions located in the Danzig and Poznan region, and 5 divisions in Finland. Of this number of divisions in East Prussia - 23-24 divisions, in Poland against the Western Front - 29 divisions, against the Kiev district (South-Western Front) - 31-34 divisions, in Romania and Hungary - 14-15 divisions.

Have they started deploying? the leader asked. Zhukov admitted that the data on this is not available.

- So what do you want to forestall them with, Comrade Zhukov? Stalin asked. - If we have already begun deployment, but they have not.

Zhukov was silent. Silent, of course, and Tymoshenko.

Stalin knew well what was the matter. The General Staff wanted to start operations as quickly as possible, while the Red Army in almost all respects has a triple advantage over the enemy - a classic advantage for the complete success of an offensive operation.

In the plan of attack presented to him, everything was provided for, except for one and, perhaps, the most important thing. There, even in a recommendatory sense, nothing was said about the date of the start of the operation. It was not said, because the leader forbade it.

All deadlines will be set by him.

Because only he alone has all the information about the situation.

"All deployment activities," the leader ordered, counting something in his mind, "complete by about July 1. Well, let's say by the 3rd, no later. And just do not succumb to any provocations from the Germans and do not provoke them. And remember, Germany will never go to war with us without doing away with England. And we'll pick the right moment..."

Everyone who knew Stalin at that time noticed that from about the second half of May, he suddenly began to fear some kind of provocation, constantly pointing out not to give in to them.

Stalin looked at Zhukov and Timoshenko and saw that none of what he had said reached them. Especially to Zhukov. Beginning with the German invasion of Greece and Yugoslavia, he constantly pestered the leader with his requests to allow the Storm to begin as soon as possible. Well, May 15, finally. Well, June 1st. The general worked 20 hours a day. He not only got a taste for the new position, but actually crushed the spineless and weak-willed Marshal Timoshenko under him. Zhukov no longer needed any advisers other than Vasilevsky and Vatutin. He even got rid of Shaposhnikov, having ensured that he was sent to the western border to imitate the construction of fortified areas. He has repeatedly, without hesitation, expressed a desire that Meretskov and Stern be sent somewhere from Moscow. "Where?" Stalin asked. Zhukov was silent.

This inhuman aggressive energy emanating from the new Chief of the General Staff began to alarm Stalin. Hitler is right. Own generals are often more dangerous than any Opponent. Someone who, and Stalin knows this, perhaps better than anyone in the world.

Hitler dismissed his generals, but he, Stalin, knows how to keep them in such a tether that no one dares even utter a word.

Of course, he understands that there have already been favorable moments when it was possible to inflict a crushing blow on the Germans. But he is waiting not just for an opportune moment, but for the most favorable moment, which will come when Hitler takes the bulk of the troops to the English Channel and throws them across the canal.

Stalin has already prepared the war politically, and only he will decide when the "Thunderstorm" blazes over Europe.

And so that Timoshenko and Zhukov understood everything correctly, he said:

"If you're out there on the border teasing the Germans—moving troops without our permission—then keep in mind that heads will roll.

And he left, slamming the door.

Let the generals scare someone else that 78 German divisions will be able, ahead of us in deployment, to strike in the directions of Riga, Minsk and Kyiv, three times inferior to us in all respects!

The optimism of the leader was not at all shared by Lieutenant Colonel Novobranets, who, oddly enough, continued not only to hold the post of head of the GRU information department, but also to test the patience of his command.

But most importantly, the lieutenant colonel continued his intelligence activities with the brilliance of a true professional.

In February, Rookie traced the well-hidden transfer to the east of another 25 German divisions, in March - 5, in April - 13, and by May 20 - another 30.

As a result, he was horrified that at least 170 German divisions were already concentrated on the Soviet border, and, taking into account the troops of Germany's allies, more than 200. The troops unloaded west of the Radom-Warsaw line and moved to the border by night marches.

At the same time, the headquarters of the new formations were located at the location of the units and institutions already located there. The recruit was also aware of the order of the commander of Army Group B (Center) on the construction of various fortifications along the border of the USSR, supposedly intended to defend against a possible Soviet offensive. It would seem that nothing special, but the order specifically stipulated that the work should not be masked. Moreover, it was proposed "not to interfere with Soviet air reconnaissance to observe the ongoing work."

The recruit knew that the same thing was happening on our side of the border, where, under the leadership of Marshal Shaposhnikov, they pretended that they were building URs to mislead the Germans about our true plans. An analysis of German rail transport showed that for every echelon arriving at the borders of the USSR, there were two going west. Undercover intelligence reported that these echelons were not bringing new troops to the canal coast, but, on the contrary, were loading and taking away units already deployed there.

But, on the other hand, there was information about the formation in Germany of a powerful airborne corps, special units of the marines and much more, which was inappropriate to use in the event of a war with the USSR.

However, the fact that the number of German divisions on the border with the USSR doubled in three months spoke for itself, but the command, as always, did not pay the slightest attention to this fact.

The recruit regularly reported to Golikov detailed reports with the numbers of new German divisions, with the names of their commanders, and indicating where this division came from, where it was deployed and where its headquarters was located.

Golikov did not argue, as he used to, he locked the report in a safe and silently released the Rookie.

However, the materials of the General Staff, which passed through the hands of the Rookie, still told him that up there, they continue to proceed from the premise that 70-80 German divisions are simply trampling against the USSR without starting deployment. Sometimes in the materials flashed the figure of 120 divisions, taking into account the troops of Hitler's allies.

This drove the lieutenant colonel no longer into horror, but into despair, just as a fatal diagnosis made by doctors to one of his relatives and especially close people drives him to despair. This is despair from the realization of one's own helplessness with anything to help.

Lieutenant Colonel Rookie was driven to despair not only by the information that came to him about the activities and plans of the German command.

No less horror was caused by what was happening in the highest echelons of the military leadership of the Red Army.

Being the most experienced and educated general staff officer, behind whom there were two military academies, Lieutenant Colonel Novobranets looked with increasing bewilderment and fear at the wild and completely illiterate actions of General of the Army Zhukov.

In fact, with his arrival to the post of Chief of the General Staff in early February 1941,

The General Staff of the Red Army ceased to exist as a specialized military institution, symbolizing the "brain of the Army", turning into a branch of the People's Commissariat of Defense, leading the distribution of manpower and military equipment according to requests received from the field.

Zhukov became the people's commissar for defense, relegating Timoshenko to the background and, as such, acted with the volcanic activity of a young pioneer playing war.

The troops were deployed along the border, like checkers in a game of giveaway, in two lines of strategic echelons. There was no operational rear. There was also no preparation of the theater for combat operations.

Between the fronts and at the junctions of the armies, terrible voids gaped, intended by design for the commissioning of the second strategic echelon, but for the time being plugged up with anything or simply open.

Every day, new military units and trains with military materials approached the border. Right in the open air, sometimes even without guards, an unthinkable amount of ammunition and military equipment was stored.

Shells, bombs, cartridges, mines, sometimes in boxes, and sometimes not, towered like Egyptian pyramids above the warehouses in the garrisons and at the district ammunition points.

Mountains of rifles and revolvers, a huge amount of uniforms and food in concentrates, individual first aid packages and much more were brought there from the rear district warehouses.

Clogging access roads and main lines, trains with tanks of diesel fuel and gasoline stretched for many kilometers, endless platforms with tanks, tractors and heavy artillery pieces humped. Aircraft were delivered directly to the airfields in their original packaging. Chaos and confusion reigned. Collective farmers from the nearest villages, mostly Balts, Poles and western Ukrainians, were driven to unload the trains. The danger of sabotage increased. Special departments worked in soap.

It became ill at the mere thought that German aircraft could suddenly fall on all this.

The General Staff ceased military scientific activity. There were no conferences with front commanders and commanders for the theoretical development of possible scenarios for the development of events and the identification of the optimal.

The commanders of armies, corps and divisions knew nothing about the tasks ahead of them. From the sealed envelopes lying in the safes with the inscription "Open upon receipt of the Thunderstorm signal" breathed cold mysticism. But if the commanders, periodically called up for district command and staff games, were still aware of something, then only guesses and general concepts reigned at the level below.

There was no equipped forefield along the entire length of the border. A whole army of prisoners was driven to the construction of URs, but did practically nothing. Combat positions were not protected by either barrages or minefields, although there were a huge number of mines. At the suggestion of some army commanders to mine the foreground, Marshal Kulik made the following clarification:

"The mines are an impressive success, but they are the weapon of the weak, those who are on the defensive. We need not so much mines as demining means when we go forward ... "Lt. Colonel Rookie saw and understood all this. He was sure that Stalin had nothing

unknown about the true situation on the border. Firstly, the true situation is not reported to him, and, secondly, being a purely civilian person, the leader of the party and the people is simply not able to understand all these specifically military issues, which he thoughtlessly handed over to completely illiterate military people. Even Shaposhnikov was expelled from the General Staff. Nothing is heard of Meretskov.

A recruit, without hesitation, would give several years of his life to be able to make a detailed report in a calm atmosphere to Comrade Stalin and members of the Politburo, explaining to them that the army and the country are rapidly sliding into a trap fraught with a military catastrophe. But this, of course, was completely impossible to implement.

Too small a man was Lieutenant Colonel Rookie, despite the fact that all the basic military secrets of both opposing sides went through his department and through his analytical brain.

We do not even know why, having graduated from the Frunze and General Staff academies, he remained a lieutenant colonel, although his classmates already commanded armies and military academies.

Only none of them was in the General Staff, where, together with Zhukov, Generals Vasilevsky and Vatutin, who also did not have the appropriate education (Vasilevsky attended only one course of the General Staff) and experience, ran the affairs.

But the Rookie did not give up. He again decided to act through Golikov's head so that his materials would come directly to Zhukov.

But Zhukov was not Meretskov.

He called Golikov and, breathing angrily into the phone, said:

- You, Golikov, that's what ... You finally put things in order in your household. For a long time, your alarmists and provocateurs will pass over your head to me the English "misinformation" and scare us all here. Find out and report!

Haggard, with eyes red from insomnia, Lieutenant Colonel Rookie continued to sit in his office for days on end, burrowing into the mountains of continuously incoming intelligence information, when on May 21 an unfamiliar general entered him.

The general's surname was Dronov. He announced that he had been appointed the new head of the information department of the GRU.

Does this seem like a surprise to you? – asked Dronov, looking at the pale and distorted face of the Rookie.

Pulling himself together, the lieutenant colonel admitted that, yes, it was a complete surprise. He was not warned even verbally. Although I expected this (and worse) every day. He called Golikov and asked when to hand over the cases.

Then the lieutenant colonel was called to the personnel department and offered to go on vacation.

The recruit replied that he was already on vacation, and two vacations a year are not supposed to.

"Nothing," laughed Colonel Kondratov, head of the personnel department, "it's supposed to be in our system. Moreover, you will have to spend it in Odessa in the Razvedupra rest house.

The Lieutenant Colonel understood what was going on. The Odessa holiday home of a closed type was intended for scouts, whose fate had not yet been made a final decision. Sometimes people

returned from there to the service, but most often disappeared forever.

In early June, the lieutenant colonel went to "rest." He was lucky, they forgot about him, and he "rested" until the very beginning of the war ...

On May 21, German radio announced the invasion of the island of Crete. The invasion was carried out from the sea and air. The paratroopers of General Studeng were landed on the island quite unexpectedly for the British, although intelligence had been warning the command for three weeks that the Germans were preparing such an operation.

The first wave of paratroopers, parachuted from huge landing gliders to capture the British airfield Maleme, immediately met with fierce resistance.

One battalion of paratroopers, dropped east of the airfield, came under murderous fire from the British from the commanding heights and was almost completely destroyed during the landing.

Another airborne regiment, dropped farther from the airfield, although it did not suffer heavy losses, could not link up with the remnants of the two battalions of the first regiment.

The situation was even worse for the second wave of paratroopers, whose task was to capture the airfields of Rethymnon and Heraklion. The preliminary bomber raid not only did not crush the British defenses, but brought it to a state of highest readiness. Those who landed on parachutes were destroyed by dagger machine-gun fire. Huge landing gliders, which each carried up to a hundred paratroopers sitting in three tiers, fell apart with a terrible crash, stumbling into special obstacles, turning into a terrible mixture of wooden debris and a mess of human bodies.

Small, cut off from each other, groups of German paratroopers took up all-round defense, not allowing the enemy to completely destroy themselves. By the end of May 20, there was still nothing to indicate the success of the invasion.

On the morning of May 21, the Germans managed to land from the air the anti-tank battalion of the parachute division and another battalion formed from the remnants of this division. Wave after wave of dive bombers, deployed on the Italian island of Sarpanto, began to fall on the positions of the British.

Under their cover, the paratroopers managed to capture the strip of the Maleme airfield, where transport aircraft with the first divisions of the Alpine riflemen began to land by noon. A fierce battle was still going on around the strip.

One of the transport planes, shot down during the landing approach, crashed onto the runway and exploded. The second plane crashed into its flaming wreckage, caught fire and began to fall apart, spitting flaming figures of people onto the runway.

The paratroopers, under deadly enemy fire, began to clear the burning wreckage of two transport vehicles. By the end of the day, the paratroopers managed to push back the fiercely resisting British and New Zealand soldiers, providing a zone with a diameter of about 3.5 kilometers around the airfield.

English shells continued to explode on the strip, but dive-bombers and fighters, constantly storming the British positions, forced the enemy to dig into the ground and ensured the landing of the Alpine shooters.

Even the day before, the Germans transferred from the Greek port of Piraeus to the island of Midos, 120 km from Crete, a whole flotilla of small coastal steamers and fishing schooners, which

were supposed to deliver to Crete light tanks, heavy mortars, anti-tank and anti-aircraft artillery and other cargo that could not be airlifted.

On the way, this convoy was intercepted by British cruisers and destroyers and almost completely destroyed. Killed 300 German sailors, specially for this purpose arrived in Greece.

But the next day, wave after wave of German dive bombers began to fall on the British ships.

Three battleships - "Berham", "Warspite" and "Velliant" received direct hits from aerial bombs, causing heavy damage to the ships. Two cruisers - "Gloucester" and "Fiji", together with two destroyers were sunk by aerial bombs, several more ships were damaged.

The aircraft carrier Formidable attacked German airfields on the island of Scarpanto with its aircraft, destroying about 20 Junkers. But on the way out, the aircraft carrier was intercepted by dive bombers taking off from airfields in North Africa. Combat air patrol fighters shot down 8 German bombers, but the rest, breaking through anti-aircraft fire, planted two bombs into Formidable.

Left without air cover, Admiral Kenningham temporarily withdrew his ships from Crete. All along the way of his withdrawal to Alexandria, the frantic "shtukos" - Yu-87 - continuously attacked his ships, sinking one more destroyer and damaging many others, losing 3 more vehicles from anti-aircraft fire.

Heavy transport ships with reinforcements and cargo for the German landing immediately moved to Crete from the Greek ports. Fierce fighting continued in Crete, but the defenders of the island, having no support from the air and from the sea, were already in a hopeless situation.

The German invasion of Crete diverted attention for a moment from another event that happened at the same time.

On the morning of May 20, the British intelligence network in Hohenhafen reported that during the night the battleship Bismarck and the heavy cruiser Prinz Eugen had disappeared from the harbor.

Later that day, both ships were sighted at sea from the Swedish cruiser Gotland, who immediately reported this by radio to Stockholm. Swedish intelligence immediately informed the British naval attache about this, and the second cipher flew to London, calling for readiness.

Coastal command reconnaissance aircraft were immediately taken into the air. Admiral Sir John Tovey, the commander of the English metropolitan fleet, ordered the patrol cruisers Suffolk and Norfolk to take up positions in the Danish Strait, and Vice Admiral Holland's formation to go to sea and proceed to the alleged point of interception of German ships south of Iceland.

Admiral Tovey received the noble prefix "sir" for participating in the Battle of Jutland, where he, commanding a destroyer, drove a torpedo into the German battlecruiser Seidditz. He was a determined and aggressive admiral, an excellent sailor and organizer. Tovey held his flag on the newest English battleship King George V - the lead ship of a new series of English armored monsters.

Obedying the order of the commander-in-chief, Admiral Horatio Holland, with the onset of darkness, took to the sea and led his formation to the point of possible interception of the enemy, consisting of the battlecruiser Hood and the battleship Prince of Wales, the second ship of the King George class

V", which recently entered service and has not yet had time to go through a full cycle of combat training.

Admiral Holland carried his flag on the battlecruiser Hood. If there was a ship that was a symbol and embodiment of the sea power of Britain, then it was undoubtedly the battlecruiser Hood, which not only was not inferior to the Bismarck in armament, size and displacement, but even surpassed it, although it was more than 20 years old. older.

Named after a whole galaxy of famous English admirals, the last of whom Horace Hood died heroically on the battlecruiser Invincible in the Battle of Jutland, the battlecruiser Hood went through the darkness of the night to intercept the enemy, towards her fate. Behind him, the battleship Prince of Wales was nodding heavily, for which this campaign was the first combat raid. Nine destroyers, covering the connection from the flanks, tried to keep up with their main forces on a large wave.

Meanwhile, the detachment of Admiral Lutyens, surrounded by four destroyers, made his way along the Norwegian coast to the north. Admiral Lutyens, who was surrounded by officers of his headquarters on the flagship bridge of the Bismarck, was faced with the question of which way to break into the expanses of the Atlantic: by the Danish Strait or the Faroe-Icelandic Passage? And again, the admiral chose the Danish Strait, hoping that the fogs and snow whirlwinds prevailing there would again give him the opportunity to slip through unnoticed and drive the English fleet well across the central Atlantic.

Having released the tankers, the Bismarck and Prinz Eugen, together with the destroyers, turned into the Grimstad Fjord south of Bergen in order to replenish fuel supplies and wait out the daylight hours in shelter. There they were discovered by a British reconnaissance aircraft, which took several aerial photographs. From the ships themselves, the aircraft was not noticed.

After reviewing the still wet photographs, Admiral Tovey ordered Holland to slow down a little and, keeping on the same course, wait for further orders.

A new reconnaissance aircraft sent to the fiord reported that the German ships had already disappeared from there.

The weather continued to deteriorate, low clouds prevented aerial observation, and a band of thick fog reliably covered the German ships when they slipped out of the fiord on the evening of May 21 and headed northwest, skirting the northern tip of England.

Soon four escorting destroyers, signaling "Happy sailing and good hunting!", Turned away to Trondheim.

The raiders were left alone.

German naval intelligence reported to the Bismarck that today, due to bad weather, it was not possible to conduct reconnaissance from the air of the main British naval base at Scapa Flow, but yesterday's data show that all the heavy ships of the British are stationed there and there are imperceptibly no signs of any increased activity at the base.

The British, having lost sight of the Bismarck, are searching the Arctic waters with planes and ships, but they cannot find anything.

Meanwhile, Lutyens had already brought his ships to the northern entrance to the Denmark Strait. The sea is calm, the fog almost disappears, only in the eastern part of the strait, near the coast of Iceland, a small haze still spreads over the sea. Naval intelligence reported to the Bismarck that aerial photographs of Scapa Flow showed that British battleships were still there. Inexperienced Luftwaffe pilots took at face value

plywood models of warships displayed in Scapa Flow specifically to mislead them.

On the evening of May 23, from the foggy haze creeping along the coast of Iceland, from the bridges of German ships they notice the silhouette of an English heavy cruiser. Then another. These are Suffolk and Norfolk. Their radio stations, like hunting horns announcing the rise of a large beast, explode the airwaves, directing Admiral Holland's formation at the enemy.

From Scapa Flow, Admiral Tovey withdraws his flagship battleship King George V and the aircraft carrier Victorious. At sea, they are joined by the battlecruiser Repulse, recalled from guarding the convoy. At full speed, the ships rush to take up a position south of Admiral Holland's detachment if they fail to intercept the Germans at the exit from the Danish Strait.

Throughout the night, the Hood and the Prince of Wales, checking their course with the messages of the patrol cruisers, go at a thirty-knot course in order to intercept the enemy by morning.

Late at night, Admiral Somerville's squadron leaves the distant Gibraltar, consisting of the aircraft carrier Ark Royal, the battlecruiser Rinaun and the light cruiser Sheffield. Somerville's ships rush north to cut off the Bismarck's escape route to Brest.

At dawn on May 24, at a distance of 17 miles, the signalmen of the Bismarck notice the ships of Admiral Holland's detachment on the horizon.

Admiral Lütjens sees for himself the reliability of German naval intelligence: the Hood, which, according to intelligence, should be off the west coast of Africa, is already holding the Bismarck in the sights of his guns at the southern exit from the Denmark Strait. In addition, intelligence assured him that there were no English battleships at sea at all. They all stand in Scapa Flow!

Confusion also reigns on English ships.

The signalmen cannot identify where the Bismarck is and where the Prinz Eugen is.

Mistakenly mistaking the Prinz Eugen for the Bismarck, the Hood unleashes the first salvo of its fifteen-inch guns on the cruiser. Shells fall with a significant flight.

At the same moment, the Prince of Wales explodes with a salvo of her ten fourteen-inch guns. Projectiles also fall with a large flight.

A second later, fifteen-inch Bismarck guns roared towards the Hood. On "Hood" opened fire and "Prinz Eugen" from his eight-inch.

Having confirmed their brilliant reputation, the German gunners cover the enemy with the first volley.

English shells again lay down with a flight. After the second German salvo, a fire breaks out on the Hood.

English shells fall short.

Suddenly, behind the bow superstructure of the English battlecruiser, a huge tongue of flame rises, taking the form of a fireball. Then clouds of steam, black smoke, glittering patches of fire and debris rise high into the air. The giant ship, raising its bow and stern into the air, slowly and terribly breaks in half.

At such a great distance, the roar of the explosion is not audible. Artillery officers on the Bismarck and Prinz Eugen, clinging to twenty-fold Zeiss rangefinders, are watching this incredible picture in disbelief.

The Bismarck and Prinz Eugen shifted their fire to the Prince of Wales, which was forced to change course abruptly to avoid crashing into the wreckage of the Hood.

An English battleship that has just left the factory, having received several hits from the Bismarck, departs, hiding behind a smoke screen.

Recovering from the shock, the British destroyers are combing the site of the sinking of the Hood. Out of a crew of 2,000, they manage to pick up only three from the water. Admiral Holland and all the officers of his staff were killed. Rejoicing and fighting excitement reign on the German ships. Especially rejoice at the "Prince Eugen". The heavy cruiser was not hit and suffered no casualties.

Bismarck was not so lucky. The Prince of Wales fired three shells into the German battleship in farewell. One of these shells caused the Bismarck quite serious damage. Once in the bow near the waterline, he opened two fuel tanks and smashed the pumping system, cutting off thousands of tons of fuel from the machines, which began to pour into the sea, leaving a multi-mile treacherous trail behind the battleship. His speed dropped, but not enough, of course, to lose combat effectiveness.

Continuing to move south towards longer nights and endless ocean, Admiral Lutyens decides to let the Prinz Eugen go on an independent raid into the ocean, and proceed to St. Nazaire, where there is a battleship dock.

The battleship was left alone, continuing to move south. Fuel gushing from broken tanks. Water, despite all efforts, continues to flood the bow compartments. Counter-flooding causes the Bismarck's speed to drop to 26 knots.

Meanwhile, the British, having come to their senses from the shock caused by the death of the Hood, are taking all measures for a new interception and destruction of the Bismarck.

Almost the entire English fleet goes into the ocean behind one German battleship, following without any security and cover from the sea and air.

Admiral Tovey launches torpedo bombers from the USS Victories. Shortly before midnight, torpedo bombers spot the Bismarck and, after breaking through her anti-aircraft fire, attempt to attack. One of the torpedoes hits the target, but, having exploded near the armor belt on the starboard side, does not cause him any harm.

At dawn on May 25, the British cruisers lose sight of the Bismarck, her search fails.

The English ships are running out of fuel, the enemy has disappeared, and Admiral Tovey is inclined to think of stopping the pursuit.

On May 26, at 10:30 am GMT, an American flying boat Catalina, operated by an American crew in American military uniform, having taken off from the northern coast of Ireland, again detects the Bismarck in the trail of fuel oil that creeps behind it.

Ignoring the anti-aircraft fire, the Catalina turned around lazily and circled over the German battleship, relaying the position, course, and speed of the enemy to the British. This was the first time that Americans had been directly involved in a war with Germany in 7 years.

months before its official start.

Ignoring the nightmarish waves, heavy wind and rain, the Swordfish biplanes - ten cars one after another - took to the air, lined up and rushed through solid clouds in search of the Bismarck. The confusion in the signals led to the fact that the torpedo bombers almost drowned their own cruiser Sheffield advanced forward and returned to the aircraft carrier without
with what.

The weather continued to deteriorate. Visibility dropped to such an extent that it was impossible to distinguish signals from the flagship Rinaun from the aircraft carrier's bridge.

Having specified the enemy's location, the torpedo bombers took off again. This time there were 14.

Dropping out of the clouds above the Bismarck itself, the Swordfish, humming with stretching wings and chirping engines, rushed to the battleship like a flock of butterflies to a roaring tiger.

The anti-aircraft guns of the desperately maneuvering battleship, trying to avoid the torpedoes intended for it, choked with fire.

Ten torpedoes were avoided, but two hit the target.

One hits the armor belt and does not cause any harm to the battleship. But the second one turns out to be fatal.

Exploding in the stern, she jammed the ship's rudder, which was placed on board.

The Bismarck lost control and could now only move in circles.

Events take a truly dramatic turn. By this time, Admiral Tovey had decided at exactly midnight to stop the pursuit. The ships began to consume the emergency fuel supply, and the battle area was inexorably approaching the border of German aviation. But having learned about the fatal torpedo, Tovey decided to continue the battle, "even if you have to return to the base in tow."

After midnight, a division of English destroyers approached the Bismarck at full speed. Like hounds tormenting a bear before the hunters approach, they circle around the Bismarck all night, trying to get into position for a torpedo attack. But the wounded monster still has enough strength to drive them away. Of the 16 torpedoes fired at the Bismarck, none hit. But the destroyers also manage to dodge the artillery fire of an unguided battleship.

The final act of this tragedy is played out on the morning of May 27th. Admiral Tovey's battleships approach the battlefield, joined at night by the Rodney, carrying nine sixteen-inch guns.

The British, keeping to the optimal heading angles from which the towers of the Bismarck walking in circles are not able to operate, begin to shoot him.

In the middle part of the Bismarck, a fire rages, the main artillery post is broken, almost all the upper superstructures are engulfed in flames or destroyed, one after another the artillery towers fail and fall silent. Around 10 o'clock in the morning, the return fire of the Bismarck ceases. The German battleship is turned into a continuous whirlwind of roaring flame, but stubbornly keeps afloat.

Then the Dorsetshire cruiser approaches the dying monster and fires four torpedoes at it point-blank.

At 10:40 on May 27, 1941, slowly sinking astern, the flaming Bismarck, without lowering the flag, sets off for the deep ocean.

The cruiser Dorsetshire and the destroyer Maori, despite the rough sea, pick up 110 people from the Bismarck crew. Among them, only one officer - Lieutenant Baron von Mullenheim-Rechberg. According to the testimonies of the prisoners, Admiral Lutyens and the Bismarck commander, Captain 1st Rank Lindemann, decided to share the fate of their ship, one of the most dramatic in the short history of the German fleet.

Chapter 16

Excitement reigned in Moscow. Say what you like, but the Germans are great! Hitler remarkably demonstrated that his threat to invade England was not empty words.

The operation to capture the island of Crete can be considered a prologue to the landing on the British Isles. Just as Crete was captured, the foothold in the south of England will be captured. All the wise men who argued with figures and facts that an invasion of England was impossible were put to shame and fell silent.

The British evacuated Crete. Their fleet was unable to prevent the German invasion without having an enemy at sea.

Now the Germans are deploying an entire airborne corps on the northern coast of France, hundreds of transport planes and gliders are being transferred from Germany.

True, the restless British did not want to admit their defeat and inflicted another insult on Stalin.

On May 30, British troops took Baghdad and overthrew the regime of Rashid Ali, with whom Stalin quite recently (May 12) concluded full diplomatic relations. Rashid, along with the Jerusalem mufti, fled to the Germans, and the damned air base in Mosul continued to be aimed at Baku, unnerving the Kremlin.

Stalin said nothing. Let them have fun before death.

Since June 1, almost a million more spares have been called up to the Red Army under the guise of training camps. No one even made a special secret out of this.

Even the army newspaper Krasnaya Zvezda announced:

"In units of the Red Army, retraining of called-up privates and junior commanding officers is being developed. As many as hundreds of thousands of fighters will join the army. The task of the cadres of the Red Army is to enable them to master new military equipment in a short time.

On June 2, Secretary of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks Shcherbakov made a report "On the Current Tasks of Propaganda," where, repeating almost word for word Stalin's speech of May 5, he added:

"The Red Army is ready on a foreign land to defend its own land". It was magnificent, and therefore met with deafening applause.

At about the same time, M. Kalinin spoke to the audience of the Military-Political

academy. Lenin. When asked when the war with Germany would begin, the "all-Union headman" exclaimed: "

The sooner, the better! We are all waiting for this ... and we will finally wring their neck!

In early June, Tsanava, People's Commissar for State Security of the Byelorussian SSR, reported to Moscow that the Germans had published an order in Warsaw newspapers forbidding the spread of rumors about an alleged war between Germany and the USSR. The perpetrators are punishable by up to five years in prison, but despite this, talk about the war between Germany and the Soviet Union does not stop.

Stalin found this measure taken by the German authorities to be absolutely correct and instructed Lavrenty Pavlovich to give ten years in the USSR to spread such rumors in the USSR. (In less than a month, about 10,000 people were imprisoned for spreading such rumors. Not one of them was released after June 22. And the last trial (in Leningrad) for spreading such rumors took place as early as July 11).

On June 6, Comrade Stalin was presented with a translation of a hooligan article that appeared in one of the leading American newspapers, which said:

"When, after the very first salvo of the Bismarck, the symbol of the British Empire, the battlecruiser Hood, which was considered the largest and most powerful ship in the world, flew into the air, when the German paratroopers effortlessly captured Crete, it became obvious that England could only hope: the mercy of Almighty God, and that Mr. Hitler's intentions to take over the British Isles are not only perfectly serious, but quite feasible.

However... the Germans must look with increasing anxiety to the east, where Stalin has deployed an army against them, the size of which is unimaginable and must inspire horror...

According to military authorities, this gigantic army has more than 10,000 tanks, 15,000 aircraft, and its artillery fleet simply cannot be counted. The forces of the Wehrmacht in the east are estimated at about 4 million people, 4 thousand tanks and 5 thousand aircraft.

In order to attack an enemy who has a double advantage in people and equipment, one must go crazy.

Is there not a coordinated plan between Moscow and London to crush Hitler and divide Europe?"

Stalin had long regarded such opuses from Anglo-American newspapers as the buzzing of an annoying fly.

But here he could not help smiling, noting the obvious lack of imagination of an unknown American publicist who wrote about 10,000 Soviet tanks as something unusual and almost supernatural.

According to the latest report, Stalin knew that the Red Army already had 23,457 tanks ready for immediate action and about 11,000 more undergoing factory tests and various stages of repair.

Such a huge superiority in forces gave confidence in the successful outcome of the operation in any, even the most unexpected, turn of the scenario.

Today, Beria presented him with the latest reports from secret agents.

"... In a personal conversation, the German military attaché, Colonel Hans von Krebs, said that Stalin ... does not consider it possible that Germany and Russia could soon start a war against each other ...

Colonel Krebs knows about the reprimand given to Admiral Kuznetsov by Stalin in the presence of Comrade L.P. Beria in the Kremlin for unauthorized orders to the Baltic Fleet to fire on German aircraft violating the airspace of the USSR. »

Stalin skimmed through the summary without expressing any interest. He had a much greater reaction to the news that on June 4 in Holland, at the age of 82, the "general sponsor" of the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, Kaiser Wilhelm II, died.

The leader expressed regret that the former Kaiser had left a fair proletarian court. What the leader had against the Kaiser remained unclear. Perhaps old Wilhelm did not pay Lenin all the promised money at one time, and Stalin knew about this?

From Beria's face, Stalin, while still looking through the reports, realized that the General Commissar of State Security had come to him to report on something much more important than the reports of sex workers. And I wasn't wrong.

Beria always liked to start small, and now he presented Stalin with a really important document.

Arrested artillery designers and engineers admitted during interrogations that their wrecking activities aimed at disrupting the production of the latest types of weapons in the USSR were personally directed by the people's commissar for armaments, Vannikov himself. Stalin carefully read the presented document twice.

He looked very upset. After all, they worked together with Vannikov in the Baku underground and in the Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate. How do enemies disguise themselves!

On the same night, People's Commissar for Armaments Boris Vannikov was arrested and sent to the Sukhanov prison.

When he was brought into the investigator's office, he, seeing Vannikov, left the table and, without swinging, hit the people's commissar in the face with his fist. Vannikov fell and was kicked several times in the stomach. Several strong hands grabbed the People's Commissar for Armaments, dragged him along a narrow corridor and threw him on the wet floor of the cell to reflect on his crimes.

A day later, it was announced that the thirty-two-year-old Dmitry Ustinov had been appointed the new People's Commissar for Armaments, and he was ordered to sharply increase the production of weapons.

On June 10, 1941, the Soviet ambassador in London, Ivan Maisky, was invited to the permanent Deputy Foreign Minister of England, Cadogan. After the usual exchange of greetings, Cadogan said:

"Mr. Ambassador, I have invited you to make an extremely important message. I ask you to take a sheet of paper and write down everything that I dictate to you. Then Cadogan read out information from British intelligence, which listed the German divisions deployed on the border with the USSR.

Maisky knew well that for forwarding such messages, one can at least

earn a reprimand with entry, but still sent a message to Moscow marked: "English disinformation."

After all, it is always useful to know what the enemy wants to convince you of.

Work in the General Staff was in full swing, not stopping for a second, day or night. The border districts of the front were suffocating from oversaturation with troops and all types of military supplies.

The General Staff explained to the commanders of the district fronts that as soon as they moved forward, echelons with cargo would follow them, planes would fly to new airfields, tank formations, divided into waves, would disperse across the European plains, and second-echelon armies would come in their place.

But it was not so easy to contain such a huge army, clearly aimed at the West and exercises, and staff games, and political pursuits, and aggressive state ideology.

Cases of shootings of border guards have become more frequent.

The aviation of the border districts constantly violates the German border, making overflights of Memel and Tilsit. The situation is even worse in the center and in the south. Kirponos arbitrarily began to occupy the foreground with his troops.

"Heads will roll!" the great leader warned unambiguously. On June 10, a stern cry flew from Moscow to Kyiv signed by Zhukov:

"... Report on what basis parts of the fortified areas of the KOVO were ordered to occupy the foreground." On the same day, an order was issued to the border districts "to ban the flights of our aviation in the border zone ...". Do not take a single step without an order from Moscow.

On June 11, a top secret orientation flew to the headquarters of the border districts, delivered by special-purpose courier air mail:

"People's Commissariat of Defense of the USSR

Top secret

Special folder

June 11, 1941

General Staff of the Red Army

Military councils of LVO, PribOVO, ZapOVO, KOVO, OdVO

7 copies. ... According to information coming through intelligence and government channels, from July 4 to July 10, 1941, German troops will undertake large-scale military operations against England, including the landing of large air and sea landing forces on the British Isles To the headquarters of military districts (fronts) and subordinate army and corps headquarters by July 1, 1941 to be ready for offensive operations ...

People's Commissar of Defense of the USSR Marshal of the Soviet Union S. Timoshenko, Head of the General

Headquarters of the Red Army General of the Army G. Zhukov, Member of the Main Military Council Secretary of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks A. Zhdanov.

Although the final version of "Thunderstorm" was approved on May 15, Zhukov urged Stalin to make new changes to it. He suggested not to waste time on trifles, but simultaneously with actions against Germany, strike at Romania as well. For this, the Chief of the General Staff proposed creating another front - the Southern, consisting of two armies.

On June 11, an order was given to form a separate Directorate of Airborne Forces of the Red Army for more flexible control of corps in battle.

In addition, an order was already prepared to move troops closer to the state border in order to meet the tight schedule of planned developments.

On June 11, Beria and Merkulov presented to Stalin excerpts from the protocol of the confrontation between Proskurov and Rychagov.

Comrade Stalin's worst fears were confirmed.

Of course, Proskurov, Rychagov and the two dozen smaller generals who have so far been arrested turned out to be just the perpetrators of a large-scale conspiracy.

Even after Rychagov's arrest, Stalin suggested that the threads leading to the leadership of the conspiracy lead to the General Staff.

And, as always, he was right!

The criminals admitted that their sabotage and wrecking operations were led by Lieutenant General Yakov Smushkevich, twice Hero of the Soviet Union, who now holds the position of Assistant Chief of the General Staff (i.e. Zhukov) for aviation. He was recruited by fascist intelligence back in Spain, where he was known as "General Douglas".

"Druzhok Zhukov," prompted Beria to Stalin silently reading the documents. The leader sighed. Everything is correct. He commanded aviation at Khalkin Gol in 1939, where he destroyed many Japanese aircraft and received a second Gold Star.

Here it is, the "Spanish gang" - Proskurov, Rychagov, Pumpur and Smushkevich. No one can communicate with foreigners! Definitely get recruited. But then it got even worse.

In the conspiracy, it turns out (as the leader assumed), the former commander of the Air Force, and now the commander of the Baltic Military District (North-Western Front), Colonel-General Alexander Loktionov, also participated in the plot, regarding which a decree has already been signed on his promotion to general of the army! There was a lot to think about!

No, you cannot start a historic event of this magnitude without completely clearing your ranks of traitors and spies! Arrest both!

(I have no proof yet, but I consider it legitimate to ask: what did Zhukov have to do with this new bacchanalia of arrests in the army? We show only the largest figures, and, of course, many more people were arrested.

Can it be considered a mere coincidence that a new wave began immediately after the appointment of Zhukov as Chief of the General Staff, covering so many participants in the battles at Khalkin Gol?)

On the morning of June 12, twice Hero of the Soviet Union, Lieutenant-General Smushkevich was arrested right in the hospital, where he had an operation three days ago, and sent right on a stretcher to the Sukhanov prison. He was immediately given a confrontation with former Lieutenant General Pavel Rychagov.

At the sight of his comrade in Spain and Halkin-Gol, Rychagov began to stray from his earlier testimony, and then fell silent. The sight of Rychagov himself, with his face swollen from beatings, bruised and bruised, in a torn undershirt with traces of blood, had such an effect on Smushkevich, who was weak after the operation, that he sometimes lost consciousness. He was given ammonia to smell.

Investigator Vlodzimirsky again read Rychagov's testimony that it was Smushkevich who organized the criminal sabotage organization and involved him, Rychagov, in it, knowing about his hatred of the Soviet regime and the worker-peasant system.

Do you confirm these statements? the investigator asked.

"No," whispered Rychagov through broken lips.

"And you," the investigator turned to Smushkevich, who was as pale as paper, "do you confirm the testimony of your accomplice Rychagov, read to you?"

"This is monstrous," Smushkevich croaked. – There was no organization... There was nothing.

There was a pause. Vlodzimirsky sighed wearily.

"What do you want," Shvartsman, who was present at the confrontation, yelled, turning to the silent Rychagov, "bring your woman here and you ... right before your eyes ?!"

With a short swing, he hit the bandages on Smushkevich's legs with a rubber club.

- What about your daughters? the investigator continued to yell, trying to drown out Smushkevich's cry. - Bring your daughters here? So that you understand that they are not joking with you, you bastard!

New swing of the baton. Desperate scream and wheeze.

Turning around, Schwartzman hit Rychagov in the face with a club. Blood spattered. Rychagov fell to the floor.

On the same day, Colonel-General Loktionov (who had received news of his promotion the day before) was arrested in Riga and transported by plane to Moscow.

From the headquarters of the district, the news immediately spread to the headquarters of the armies, and then to the entire district, when a new commander flew to Riga - Colonel General Fyodor Kuznetsov, appointed on the personal recommendation of Zhukov.

General Loktionov was also confronted with Rychagov. The old general cursed both Rychagov and the investigators. He was knocked down from a stool with a blow from a rubber truncheon and they began to beat him. boots.

Bloodied, he was again put on a stool and investigator Vlodzimirsky asked if he pleaded guilty to being a member of a criminal organization.

- Yes, the general answered, wiping the blood from his face with his palm, - I admit that all my life I was in a criminal organization called the Bolshevik Party.

On the morning of June 12, Timoshenko and Zhukov were finally received by Stalin. Molotov was in the leader's office. Stalin was pale. It felt like he had a restless night. Stalin asked if they knew what had happened in the Baltic region, referring to the arrest of Loktionov.

Although the question was asked to the people's commissar, Zhukov answered: "Yes, we know. The new commander has already flown to Riga."

Stalin approved all the measures proposed by the General Staff, except for the creation of the Southern Front, saying that this should be considered.

And who will coordinate the actions of the Southern and Southwestern fronts?

Zhukov was tired of remembering names, and he offered himself. The General Staff will be left at Vasilevsky.

So, the actions of the Western Front will be coordinated by Shaposhnikov. He is already there. Southern and Southwestern - Zhukov. You asked for it. And the Northwest? The commander there is new, inexperienced.

Zhukov immediately suggested Meretskov. Let it go to work. And that is inconvenient. He was chief of the General Staff, and now works as chief of department. Always dissatisfied. It interferes with work when your former boss is your subordinate.

Stalin glanced at Zhukov, but said nothing.

On June 12, 1941, a directive flew to the district fronts to begin moving troops to their original positions in order to complete the deployment, as ordered earlier, by July 1.

"On June 12," the documents say, "under the guise of exercises and a change in the location of summer camps, the command of the border districts began to covertly deploy troops of the second echelons." As envisaged by the cunning plan of the Thunderstorm.

A gigantic army on the entire vast front from the Baltic to the Black Sea began to stir, secretly turning around in their original positions. Behind them, at the turn of the Western Dvina and Dnieper rivers, the armies of the second echelon are menacingly unfolding.

No later than July 1, ordered to take up initial positions for the offensive 12 armies of the first echelon.

Another 5 armies are in the reserve of the main command and on secondary sections of the border.

The world has not known such power since the campaigns of Genghis Khan!

But Genghis did not have tanks, planes, artillery, chemical weapons and telegraph.

"... The hour has come. On June 19, I begin to remove troops from the eastern border, as you can easily see when the engines of the combat vehicles roar, following for loading to the nearest railway stations. We are catastrophically short of cargo tonnage and personnel. Apparently it will be necessary, without any publicity, of course, to urgently withdraw German ships from all ports of Sweden, Finland and the USSR, as well as from the Danube. Even the personnel of our naval attaches in many capitals, including Moscow, will have to be temporarily withdrawn The most dangerous time is approaching. Unfortunately, the rumors spread by the British about an imminent conflict between us greatly affected the mood

troops. To be frank, this was facilitated by the call-up of more than a million reservists officially announced by you. There is an opinion among the troops that when they march on the British, you will order your troops to advance on Germany ...

In this regard, I earnestly ask you to make some official statement, refuting the English speculation and making it clear to my valiant soldiers that they can turn their bayonets to the west with the same confidence as last summer without fear for safety. their rears.

I confess that I fear my generals even more than the English, and therefore I appeal to you again with a request not to give them any reason to even try to frustrate the plan, which I consider the goal of my life ...

Sincerely, Adolf Hitler."

By order of Stalin, Molotov drew up the necessary document. Stalin carefully read it, endorsed it and gave it back to Molotov. He immediately went to the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, where the German ambassador Schulenburg was summoned late in the evening.

"No. 1368 of June 13, 1941.

People's Commissar Molotov has just handed me the following text of the TASS report, which will be broadcast on the radio tonight and published tomorrow in the newspapers:

"Even before the arrival of the British Ambassador to the USSR, Mr. Cripps, in London, and especially after his arrival, rumors began to be circulated in the English and foreign press in general about the imminence of a war between the USSR and Germany. According to these rumors:

1. Germany allegedly presented the USSR with claims of a territorial and economic nature ...
2. The USSR allegedly rejected these claims, in connection with which Germany began to concentrate its troops near the border of the USSR in order to attack the USSR.
3. The Soviet Union, in turn, began to intensively prepare for war with Germany and is concentrating its troops near the border of the latter.

Despite the obvious senselessness of these rumors, responsible circles in Moscow nevertheless considered it necessary ... to authorize TASS to declare that these rumors are clumsily concocted propaganda of forces hostile to the USSR and Germany, interested in further expanding and unleashing a war ...

Schulenburg".

The next day, the TASS statement was published in all Soviet newspapers, starting with Pravda, and was periodically broadcast like a radio beacon.

On the same day, June 14, 1941, special detachments of the NKVD began the mass deportation of the population from the operational rear of the fronts. The territories of all three Baltic republics, areas of Western Ukraine, Western Belarus and Bessarabia were considered as such.

The detachments acted clearly, according to pre-compiled lists. The soldiers of the NKVD, with the support of the police, broke into the houses, gave 10 minutes to get ready, stuffed trucks with people, some were driven on foot to the station, where the trains of goods were already waiting. People were herded in whatever they were, and stuffed boxcars carried them non-stop to eastern Siberia.

Only 7,000 families were deported from Tallinn, 11,000 from Riga, and 10,000 from Kaunas thousand.

Things were not going so smoothly in the countryside. Many scattered through the forests, forming semi-spontaneous resistance units, which were very useful to Field Marshal Leeb's soldiers in just a week.

All Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Gomel, Lvov, Galician and other SS divisions, formed by the Germans from fled and hidden men, whose mothers, wives, children and old people were thrown into Siberia on the right death. Without agreeing, on the same day the Germans launched a similar action on their side, but on a much larger scale.

But the main thing was the following: all Russians living in Germany and in the territories occupied by the Germans, aged 16 to 50, regardless of gender, were subject to temporary detention until further notice. (On the territory of occupied France, right at the gates of his house, the wife of the famous Russian general Anton Ivanovich Denikin was captured. The general rushed to the Gestapo, shouting: "Gentlemen, you made a mistake! You, apparently, came for me!" The Gestapo did not even honor him with a glance - the famous white general was well over 50 years old.)

Ribbentrop showed Schulenburg's telegram to Hitler. Hitler was calm as Dr. Morrel doubled the dose of his injections. This is how a gambler is calm when he is about to break the bank, bluffing without a single trump card in his hands and waiting for the moment when his partner, a professional cheater, relaxes, because he has all four aces and two more hidden in his sleeve. Then you can, brushing the cards to the floor, stun the sharper with a candelabra, grab the money and then arrange a fight with everyone present, hoping for Providence ...

What seemed like a hopeless undertaking, it seems, began to succeed. An absolutely incredible amount of work has been done over the past three months.

By the beginning of the operation, according to the Barbarossa plan, fuel supplies were created for a 700-800 km march for all types of combat vehicles and vehicles. Each infantry division had two rounds of ammunition, and the tank division had three. This should have been enough for the first 10 days of fighting.

On June 14, Hitler called a meeting to implement the Barbarossa plan. After listening to the reports of the commanders of the army groups and clarifying a number of questions, Hitler determined the final date for the attack - at dawn on June 22.

Conditional signal for the offensive "Dortmund".

Having dined with the generals, Hitler then gave them a long speech. Pointing out that he was placing the fate of the country in the hands of the army, Hitler emphasized that it was absolutely impossible to tolerate such a powerful army on its borders as Stalin's. He believes in his army and is sure that the Bolshevik army, as well as the Bolshevik ideology, will be destroyed quickly and decisively.

"Some newspapers of neutral countries," continued Hitler, "foretell us a terrible

the end of this journey. So I will tell you, gentlemen, that a terrible end is better than horror without end. Besides," Hitler concluded, "the defeat of Russia would force England to capitulate as well."

Everyone who was with the Fuhrer that day remembered his words spoken on the eve of the attack on the USSR: "Better a terrible end than horror without end." These were not Hitler's words. These are the words of Goethe. But everyone understood that it was they he carried in his soul, seeing the noose already tightened around his throat.

Comrade Stalin had his own problems. When making decisions, he thought them over from all sides, isolating especially dangerous consequences. Thinking of throwing the army on a European campaign, the leader clearly saw the main danger: the inevitable wide contacts of the Red Army soldiers with the population of the occupied territories, who profess a completely different morality than the Soviet people.

Now, however, times are different. The NKVD divisions were deployed behind the two echelons of the armies. Political and special departments permeate the army to the level of companies and platoons.

Secret directives warned political agencies and special departments of personal responsibility for unauthorized contacts between servicemen and the local population. In turn, the Military Councils of the districts (fronts) report that with such a sharp increase in the number of armed forces, an acute shortage of political officers was revealed.

On reflection, Stalin decided that the comrades were right.

It was decided to draft into the army a certain number of liberated paragraf workers from enterprises and institutions, carefully selecting them through the city committees and regional committees.

On June 14, the new commander of the Northwestern Front, Colonel General Kuznetsov, gave the order on the occasion of his assumption of office. Rumors about the arrest of General Loktionov had already spread throughout all parts of the district front, which made the personnel in a fever. It was necessary to bring people to their senses and calm them down.

"Today, more than ever," the order of Colonel General Kuznetsov said, "we must be in full combat readiness ... Everyone must firmly and clearly understand that at any moment we must be ready to carry out any combat mission."

Already Kuznetsov knew well what combat mission lay ahead. Yes, and he is not alone.

On the same day, the deployment of the rifle corps of the Southwestern Front to their original positions began. The advance of troops was carried out under the guise of their redeployment to a new camp site.

On the Western Front, by order of Army General Pavlov, units of rifle corps moved to their original positions. Formations of four tank corps were moved directly to the border.

On the evening of June 14, the People's Commissar of Defense ordered the military councils of the Baltic, Western and Kiev districts to transfer command and control to the front-line headquarters of the North-Western, Western and South-Western fronts deployed in advance.

On June 15, looking through intelligence reports, Stalin was bitterly convinced that almost all of Soviet intelligence had fallen into the networks of Anglo-American provocateurs. Warnings of an impending German attack were pouring in from all sides. The scouts simply reported what they saw and heard.

The leader was in a good mood in the morning, and therefore allowed himself to write humorous resolutions on the reports. On the report of the military attaché in Berlin, General Tupikov,

warning that the war would begin on June 22, Stalin wrote: "Tell the stupid general that this is an English provocation."

Even Dekanozov himself joined the flow of disinformation. What happened to him? He had already consulted with Beria and Molotov whether it was time to recall Dekanozov and conduct an investigation. And why are there no messages from Akhmedov? Izmail Akhmedov, the most experienced liquidator of the NKVD, was sent to Germany at the end of May in order, if necessary, to take decisive measures against provocateurs and alarmists.

The illegal residents, having heard about the arrival of Akhmedov, rushed in all directions, some to Belgium, some to France, and some even to the USA. Chasing them, Akhmedov also reached the United States, where he decided to stay forever and write his memoirs on the topic "Stalin's Secret Police." The book went through 11 editions in many languages.

Stalin did not know about this yet. And when he found out, he was not even very angry. If Akhmedov had fulfilled his mission, by June 22 he would have cut out our entire illegal intelligence network in Europe. And how useful she was!

With a disturbing message coming from the Baltic.

German merchant ships, not even having finished loading, began one after another to leave the Soviet ports for home. Stalin read this summary, mechanically nodding his head. He knew what was the matter. He knew even more.

About 30 Soviet cargo ships, some of them for almost a month now, are in the roads of various ports in Germany and Denmark. They were to help the Germans in the transfer of the second echelon of troops to England.

Of the intelligence reports, only one received the favorable attention of Stalin. A source in Gotenhafen reported that, according to him, the new battleship Tirpitz was going to go to sea with the Admiral Scheer on July 10. Stalin ordered that this report be sent to the General Staff.

On June 16, a completely unexpected directive arrived in all districts. On Friday, June 20 and Saturday, June 21, it was allowed to release personnel on leave. Officers - until the morning of Monday, June 23. From Thursday, June 19 until June 23, it was allowed to carry out 25-hour routine maintenance in air units, and park days in tank and artillery units. At the discretion of the unit commanders. This caused general joy.

Only Stalin was not amused.

Beria and Merkulov continued to promote the "Spanish conspirators". The name of Colonel General Stern began to appear too often in the testimony. They asked permission from the leader to interrogate Stern as a witness.

The evidence was there. He fought in Spain, where he joined a criminal group, and it is possible that he created it himself.

Stalin thought and said:

Why a witness? You need to interrogate properly. And find out, finally, who led them all.

Then we moved on to current issues.

Intelligence reports that in the area of Warsaw and in East Prussia all the junction stations are packed with trains.

One of our agents entered the headquarters of the 175th Wehrmacht Infantry Division. All the walls there are hung with maps of the southern regions of England with the development of tasks to capture bridgeheads.

Beria reported that tomorrow the measures for the surrender of the state border by the troops of the NKVD to the management of the fronts would begin. After that, the border guards will join the NKVD divisions deployed behind the invading armies.

In parallel with the troops subordinate to the Commissariat of Defense, a whole army of NKVD troops has already been created - 18 divisions and separate regiments. Divisions are organized even better than army rifle divisions, since their tasks are more important. In addition to their protective functions in relation to their own army, they should be engaged in their direct business - to "clean" the rear of the army in the process of its offensive to the West. Everything is modeled on the Baltic states, Poland and Bessarabia.

But this is not enough. On April 23, 1941, by secret order of Stalin, a fundamentally new organization was created: the Directorate of Operational Troops of the NKVD under the command of Lieutenant General of the NKVD Artemiev. This parallel army is ready to solve a wide variety of tasks: from suppressing centers of resistance remaining in the rear of the advancing Red Army to deporting the population of an average European city within a day.

On June 17, Colonel-General Grigory Stern was arrested right in his office of the Red Army Air Defense Directorate. He was taken to the Lubyanka inner prison and, without asking a single question, they locked him in a box for those under investigation.

And in Sukhanovka, investigators beat the former People's Commissar for Armaments, Boris Vannikov, in mortal combat. They beat him with rubber clubs, fists, kicked him in the stomach and groin, demanding to name his accomplices. Vannikov fell to the floor, and investigator Rhodes began to stomp on him, jumping on him, shouting: "You say! You will say everything!"

Vannikov roared in pain, wept, but did not testify against anyone. Then investigator Sorokin remembered that they had a nail-pulling machine in their investigation department, donated by the Gestapo back in 1939.

They brought a typewriter and, for a start, tore off the nail from the ring finger of the former people's commissar's left hand. He lost consciousness. They doused it with water, gave it a sniff of ammonia ...

In a completely insensible state, Vannikov signed a testimony, where Generals Gerasimenko, Vertsev, Shelkovy, Charekii, Batov, Khokhlov, Mirzakhanov, Gulyants, Zhezlov, Lazarev, Vetoshkin, Kotov and Ioffe were named as his accomplices. They were arrested without asking for special permission from Stalin. In a series of rapidly developing events, Gerasimenko was almost forgotten. He was arrested only on July 5 and shot in February 1942.

Meanwhile, Stern was cut off the buttonholes with the stars of the colonel-general, unscrewed the Gold Star of the Hero of the Soviet Union and other orders from the tunic, took away the belt and belt, cut off the buttons on the riding breeches, giving out ropes in return, and in this form they took him for interrogation, which, given the high in the past, the position of the arrested person was carried out by the People's Commissar of State Security Vsevolod Merkulov himself.

Investigator Shvartsman was also present at the interrogation, sitting modestly at a corner table, sorting through papers.

Merkulov very politely asked Stern not to take time from himself or from them, but to sincerely confess to all crimes in order to alleviate his own plight and reduce guilt before his homeland.

Stern, who was surprisingly calm, asked him what he was accused of?

"We hoped that you yourself would tell us about your crimes," said Merkulov. "Believe me, in your position, locking yourself up is stupid.

To which Stern stubbornly stated that he had not committed any crimes against the motherland and the party. And he has nothing to say.

Then Investigator Shvartsman, with a weary sigh, got up from the table and, going up to Stern, lashed him in the face with a bundle of electrical wires. And so fortunately that he immediately knocked out the colonel-general's right eye. Blood spattered, Stern fell from his chair to the floor.

Merkulov looked reproachfully at Schwartzman. An expensive carpet was laid on the floor, as befits a people's commissar's office.

Shvartsman apologized, saying that his hand was cramped "from proletarian hatred". He wanted to hit him in the neck, but hit him in the face.

I had to call an escort so that they would take Stern for dressing and bring him to his senses, and then sent him to the Sukhanovskaya prison.

Merkulov also ordered that the carpet be rolled up in his office and a new one laid, promising Schwartzman to deduct the cost of cleaning the carpet from his salary. To which Colonel Shvartsman replied with a forced smile.

That could well have happened. And went to Sukhanovka. They were soon brought there from Lubyanka and Stern for a confrontation with Rychagov, who was already in a state close to insanity. Stern groaned as he held on to the bloody patch over his eye. Schwartzman immediately promised to gouge out his other eye if he continued to lock himself up.

"It is the duty of every honest Soviet citizen," Shvartsman recalled in a soft, tired voice, "to help the investigation in every possible way."

However, an attempt to awaken civic duty in the former colonel-general with heartfelt words was not crowned with success. Stern continued to moan and stubbornly refused to plead guilty.

Then investigator Zozulov ordered him to stand up and hit him in the crotch with his boot. Stern screamed, fell and lost consciousness.

He was dragged by the legs into the cell. They also took Rychagov to the cell, who sang a song about airplanes and girls.

On June 17, US President Roosevelt received another letter from Prime Minister Churchill. "Judging by the information from all sources," the British Prime Minister reported, "in the near future the Germans will apparently make a strong attack on Russia ...

If this new war breaks out, we will, of course, give the Russians every possible encouragement and assistance, proceeding from the principle that the enemy we need to defeat is Hitler.

I do not expect any class political reaction here and I hope that the German-Russian conflict will not create any difficulties for you.

Roosevelt responded immediately, assuring Churchill that if the Germans attacked Russia, he would immediately publicly support "any statement the Prime Minister makes hailing Russia as an ally".

The President and Hopkins were in Roosevelt's inner office, adjacent to the Oval Room of the White House. The President was sorting through his huge collection of postage stamps, and Hopkins, disheveled and unshaven, lay on the sofa, looking through the newspapers.

When Roosevelt read Churchill's message to Hopkins, he asked:

- If Stalin attacks first, what will we do? Support Hitler? And how to explain it to the world? Roosevelt laughed.

Yes, we would be in the most stupid position. By the way, many senators are just like that. If Stalin does this, he will destroy the whole scheme that we have developed for the next five years. But luckily I'm sure he won't. He's waiting to land in England. Everyone assured him of this, not just the Germans. Adolf is already well aware that he is finished, and therefore he will put all the strength that he still has into his blow.

It will be a terrible blow, Harry, trust me. Stalin will not recover from it soon, and Hitler will never recover. Of this I have no doubt. Something else worries me. We need to go to war, but I don't know how to do it.

"Maybe we shouldn't rush," Hopkins suggested, "let the guys at Los Alamos finish the job. Hitler gave us an invaluable gift, dividing even physics into Jewish and Aryan.

"No," the president said. - Groves reported to me that the completion of work cannot be expected before 1944. It will be late. The President thought for a moment, then said dreamily:

"It once took the bombing of the battleship Maine in Havana to stir up the average American and force him to demand a declaration of war on Spain from the government. It was because of that war that America was accepted into the club of the great powers of the world. What should explode now, so that our kind man in the street would demand from the government to immediately enter the war?

"Frank," Hopkins laughed back, "you are the supreme commander. Give the order to our guys to bomb some Jap base in Indochina. As far as I know them, they will immediately bomb something from us in response. And Congress will have no choice but to sanction your actions - the actions of the president.

"No," Roosevelt said firmly. - In no case. We are a democratic, peaceful country. We must have an impeccable reputation. We will continue to piss them off. Hitler and the Japanese have bad nerves, they are prone to tantrums, and something is bound to explode.

Before the explosion expected by the president, there was already quite a bit - a little more than five months.

In the terrible explosion that followed at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, even the theoretical possibility for Hitler and his allies to get out of this terrible war was finally buried.

On June 18, it was reported from the districts and front headquarters that the preparation of the theater of operations for the offensive would be completed by the evening.

Demining of bridges and passages has begun on all sections of the border. Special detachments of the NKVD are deployed right on the bridges.

Work is in full swing in the headquarters of all levels. At the regimental level, the commanders of infantry and tank battalions receive new maps of adjacent territories with the order: study them and

prepare for a specific combat mission.

Artillerymen receive specific tasks and coordinates for artillery preparation. At the airfields, in front of the pilots and navigators, photographs and diagrams of objects of bombing and attack, finally taken out of the safes, are exhibited.

On the evening of June 18, the headquarters of formations and formations on the entire front from the Barents to the Black Sea were raised on combat alert and put on full alert.

The troops began to move directly into the border zone. Then the commanders of the border districts and fronts gave the order: to bring the level of combat readiness of the armies of the second echelon to the level of combat readiness with the troops of the first echelon.

On the same day, General Voronov was appointed to the vacant position of the head of the Air Defense Directorate of the Red Army. Radio operators, telephone operators, teletype operators did not leave their devices at the headquarters of the fronts, districts, corps and divisions, waiting for the "Thunderstorm" signal.

Everyone, up to the front commanders, slept at combat posts, without undressing, but only loosening their belts. There was no signal...

Late in the evening, Stalin, who was at a nearby dacha, was informed that a car of the People's Commissar of Internal Affairs had driven up to the gates of the dacha territory, asking to be received on a matter of extreme importance.

Beria was paler than usual and was very nervous.

He reported to the leader that a general had been discovered leading the conspirators from the General Staff.

- Meretskov? – immediately guessed the leader.

Beria nodded his head mournfully.

This was a surprise! Former Chief of the General Staff, one of the main developers of the Thunderstorm! All military intelligence, military and naval attachés in all countries, all command and control, all strategic plans and tactical developments closed on him!

In the dead of night, Army General Zhukov was raised from his bed and called to Stalin's dacha.

Upon learning of Meretskov's betrayal, the current Chief of the General Staff felt unwell and sank heavily into a chair, holding his hand to his heart.

The eyes of Comrade Stalin burned with an unearthly flame.

At first, they wanted to arrest Meretskov right at dawn today. But Stalin himself and Zhukov, who came to his senses, told Beria that this should not be done.

Too big figure. His arrest and the inevitable rumors about it may for some time disorganize the entire work of the General Staff. No! Meretskov should simply disappear. Since he has already been appointed Commander-in-Chief of the North-West Direction, then let him go to Leningrad no later than June 21, arrest him there along with all his escorts and secretly transfer him back to Moscow,

"Could it be some kind of mistake? Zhukov dared to suggest.

"We'll figure it out," the chief assured. "There have been too many such "mistakes" lately.

Then a natural question arose: who should be sent as commander-in-chief of the direction to the North-West?

"Send Voroshilov," Stalin ordered wearily, remembering the only person who could still be trusted in this sinister web of betrayals and conspiracies.

On the morning of June 19, the American broadcasting company Columbia Broadcasting Systems reported that the Soviet Union had attacked German troops at 15 points along the border. Fierce battles ensued. Apparently, someone in America has become completely unbearable.

The entire world press is already writing about the Soviet-German conflict as an almost accomplished fact. The general tone of the international press emphasizes that the Germans have very little chance of success if conflict breaks out.

On the other hand, Pravda came out from the front, completely refuting such fabrications. The front was called: "Summer rest of the working people."

Around 10 a.m. along the entire border, which was now called the border with Germany, the engines of thousands of tanks and armored personnel carriers of the Wehrmacht roared,

This was immediately reported to Comrade Stalin when he arrived at the Kremlin at about one in the afternoon.

The leader limited himself to a mysterious smile, sucking on an extinct pipe. Zhdanov was sitting in the waiting room with a somewhat bewildered face. He had just read a report in Pravda that he had gone to Sochi on vacation for rest and treatment.

"Relax," Stalin advised Zhdanov, "treat yourself, and return by July 1."

Recently, from excessive smoking and frequent alcohol consumption, Zhdanov's asthma attacks have become more frequent. He really needed to rest.

On June 19, Soviet bombers, fighters and attack aircraft began flying to field airfields near the border. Obeying the order of the People's Commissar of Defense, the People's Commissar of the Navy, Admiral Kuznetsov, transferred all fleets and flotillas to operational readiness No. 2, warning of the transition to full combat readiness No. 1 in the coming days.

At the railway stations of Poland and East Prussia there are military echelons. Cars with red banners: "Vir faren gegen England!" ("We are heading against England!"). Tanks heavily enter the platform. These are reserve divisions. They will be unloaded behind the Warsaw-Radom line and sent back to the east.

On Beria's desk lies an informative report by a secret informant embedded in the American embassy. He reports that the American journalist Alice Leon-Moutut told everyone that the second secretary of the German embassy, having met her, said literally the following: "I regret that I misinformed you by indicating June 17 as the date of the invasion. The attack will take place on June 21." The American journalist added: "Everyone is already tired of warning the Russians ..."

"They should stop warning us as soon as possible," Stalin remarked irritably after reading the message. - The head is already spinning from their provocations. I didn't even expect it to take on such a scale! The leader got excited and lit his pipe, releasing a puff of smoke. On his desk are reconnaissance reports just brought by General Golikov: the Germans have begun loading troops into echelons.

"Let them warn their English friends to prepare better for a fight for their own islands.

The leader is irritated. Meretskov's betrayal does not come out of his head. What did this scoundrel do

tell the Germans about the "Thunderstorm"? Wouldn't have ruined the whole operation! Rather, you need to take him and properly interrogate him. Zhukov reassures Stalin.

- What is the worst option? Will the Germans themselves attack us? Only at the border we have a triple superiority in all respects. We will immediately stop them, surround them and destroy them. And morally even better. Everyone will see that we have been attacked.

Now all the border units of the Wehrmacht have been set in motion and, judging by the first reports already coming through the GRU line, they have begun loading at least three divisions into the echelons leaving to the west.

Stalin listens with a tired look to the Chief of the General Staff, following his pointer running around the map with his eyes.

Stalin has Pravda on his desk (for Wednesday, June 18). "TASS message" is underlined in blue pencil.

It says that

A special archaeological expedition of the Leningrad State Hermitage removed a heavy slab of green jade from the tomb of Tamerlane in the Gur-Emir mausoleum in Samarkand, opening the sarcophagus of the great conqueror. The message mentioned that there was an inscription on the slab saying that the one who opened the tomb of Tamerlane would release the merciless spirits of a bloody and devastating war onto his country...

"Just don't succumb to any provocations," Stalin warned after listening to Zhukov's next report. - Without my personal permission, no one has the right to open fire under any circumstances. Heads will fly.

"Tomorrow," the leader continued, "and by Monday, the state of combat readiness will be removed. Everything is according to plan, including the rest of the front commanders.

On June 20, the English newspaper The Times comes out with a large headline: "Germany and Russia face to face." An entire page is dedicated to the topic.

The correspondent of The New York Times reported from Ankara: "Diplomatic sources report that the war of the Reich with the Soviets may begin within the next 48 hours."

In Finland, the recruitment of reservists under the age of 44 has begun. Newspapers publish appeals to the population: "Every Finn must stand up for the Motherland without hesitation, as in 1939."

Panic gripped the seaside towns of Romania and Bulgaria. At the height of the season, the first-class Black Sea resorts of the Gold Coast died out. All highways leading from Constanta inland are packed with refugees.

A Swedish government spokesman stated that "his country has already taken all measures to ensure that the Soviet-German war does not take it by surprise."

In Berlin, foreign journalists storm the press center of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Ritters himself comes out to them. He is bombarded with questions. What do all these rumors mean? Is it true that clashes have already begun on the Soviet-German border? Ritters categorically denied all rumors.

"There are no signs of a crisis in the Soviet capital," a Reuters correspondent reports from Moscow.

The editorial of Pravda is entitled "Against Talkers and Loafers" and calls for fighting for "efficiency in work, against chatter and chatter that covers up inactivity."

The roar of engines continues along the Soviet border.

The tension is unbearable, it seems that it hangs in the air and makes it difficult to breathe. Moscow is being asked from the front headquarters: does the previously received instruction allowing the dismissal of personnel remain in force?

Moscow answers not just "yes", but "mandatory".

As Churchill ironically put it, "everything that is 'possible' in Russia is absolutely possible."

Commander-in-Chief of the Western Front, General of the Army Pavlov, was surprised when Corps Commissar General Fominykh, a member of the military council of the front, suggested that he go to a performance that would take place tomorrow at the Minsk District Officers' House.

- What kind of theater is there ?! - tried to brush aside the commander,

"This is an order," Fominykh replied, not really understanding anything himself. Colonel-General Kuznetsov was also sent to the theater, and Army General Kirponos was ordered to spend Saturday, June 21, at the Kiev Dynamo stadium - to watch the next match for the USSR football championship.

Let the Germans calmly withdraw their troops.

"Secret Decree of the Politburo on the organization of the Southern Front and the appointment of command personnel

June 21, 1941

Special folder dated June 21, 1941 (The date is inscribed by Stalin's hand.)

1. Organize the Southern Front as part of two armies with the seat of the Military Council in Vinnitsa.
2. Appoint Comrade Tyulenev as commander of the Southern Front, leaving him in the position of commander of the Moscow Military District ... "

Two armies of the new front are aimed at Romania. They have been deployed for a long time. They just need to be organized in one front.

Stalin read the document and asked:

- When does Meretskov leave for Leningrad?

He was told that he was leaving today with the Red Arrow. Will arrive tomorrow morning.

Zhukov and Timoshenko have a question on their tongues: when will we start Groza? But Stalin himself answers this question. The Germans will complete the transfer of troops around 1 July. It will take another two weeks to deploy troops. The landing on the British Isles will take place between 15 and 20 July. Not later than. And we will start exactly three days after their landing. That is, D+3 day. D-day is theirs, D+3 is ours.

Now, the leader continued, they are moving troops and there is a danger that some of their generals, recruited by British intelligence, will try to unleash a conflict on our border. Let them shoot, let them do what they want. Burrow into the ground and sit quietly. It's clear?

The military left. They were replaced by Molotov, who brought Stalin an interesting document that passed through his people's commissariat.

"Top secret. Ex. No. 1.

To the head of the protocol department of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs of the USSR Comrade Barkov V.N. June 19, 1941 ... after registering the trips of foreigners, I drew attention to the following circumstance: the entire apparatus of the German naval attache consists of seven people ...

As of June 20, not one of the employees known to me remains in the attaché office, which is somewhat unusual and strange, which I consider it necessary to bring to your attention.

Stalin, although he knew about this from the reports of the NKVD, read the certificate with a smile and silently postponed.

Everything is correct, everything fits. German sailors are needed now at home.

Stalin then asked Molotov if he had seen Schulenburg today.

Molotov received the German ambassador today and, in an extremely blunt manner, demanded an explanation from him about the incessant overflights by German aircraft of the border territories of the USSR.

The German ambassador replied that Mr. Dekanozov should have visited the Imperial Minister of Foreign Affairs and obtained from him all the explanations on this matter. Dekanozov was ordered to obtain an appointment with Ribbentrop and hand him a verbal note with the following content:

"By order of the Soviet Government, the Embassy of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in Germany has the honor to make the following statement to the German Government:

The People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs of the USSR, by a verbal note dated April 21, informed the German embassy in Moscow about violations of the border of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics by German aircraft ... ".

It was the first of a planned series of notes, the purpose of which was to aggravate Soviet-German relations by presenting new and sharper claims to Germany, the culmination of which should (by design) be reached on the very eve of the invasion.

Stalin pushed aside the intelligence reports, which had tired him with their stupid tendentiousness, and asked Beria if everything was ready for Meretskov's arrest.

Lavrenty Pavlovich reported that everything was ready. They just haven't decided yet where to take it: right on the train or on the platform.

Stalin said that it was better right on the train. Beria agreed. The entire train brigade is made up of operatives and two neighboring cars are also packed with operatives.

Stalin asked how the investigation was going, what new things had been established? Beria reported that a picture of a very large conspiracy was already being revealed. Much larger than even in 1937

year. Stalin only sighed, shaking his head in dismay, and began to fill his pipe.

While Stalin was trying to make sense of the dark and dirty labyrinth, teeming with conspiring generals and agent provocateurs, Hitler, exhausted by the tedious waiting for the "H" hour, wrote a long letter to his only friend, Mussolini. The letter betrayed the exhausted state of mind of the Fuhrer, tormented by his diabolical games in the last days before the attack on the insidious Moscow partner.

"Duce," the Fuhrer poured out his soul, "I am writing this letter to you at a moment when months of hard thinking, as well as endless nervous waiting, ended with the adoption of the most difficult decision in my life. I believe that I have no right to endure such a situation any longer after the last map of the situation in Russia was presented to me...

Both states, Soviet Russia and England, are equally interested in a disintegrated Europe, weakened by a long war. Behind these states stands the North American Union in a pose of instigator and expectant. After the liquidation of Poland, a consistent direction appears in Soviet Russia, which cleverly, cautiously, but steadily returns to the old Bolshevik tendency to expand the so-called

"Soviet, socialist front". In other words, expansion to the infinite limits of the Soviet state. It is nothing more, nothing less than the sovietization of the whole world...

You see, Duce, that a noose is being thrown over us, without actually giving time to do anything ... Therefore, after much thought, I came to the conclusion that it is better to break this noose before it is tightened ...

The material that I intend to gradually publish about Stalin's plans to crush Europe is so extensive that the world will be more surprised at our long-suffering than at our decision ...

(No one in the world was going to listen to any of his arguments. In the eyes of world public opinion, he already fell into the position of a terrorist who blew up a residential building and tried to explain to the police what scoundrels inhabited this house.

But after the end of the Second World War, all pre-war plans lost their sharpness.

In addition, no one was interested in changing the historical scheme of responsibility of various countries for an unprecedented global crisis. The old thesis played a big role here: "Woe to the vanquished!").

In conclusion, I would like to tell you one more thing. I feel inwardly free again after I have come to this decision. Collaboration with the Soviet Union, with all the sincere desire to achieve final detente, often weighed on me. For it seemed to me a break with all my past, my outlook and my former obligations. I am happy that I have been freed from this moral burden.

With cordial and comradely greetings. Sincerely yours, Duce, Adolf Hitler.

On a thousand-kilometer line of confrontation, vibrating with tension, like stretched

strings of giant bows, two huge armies stood, waiting for the agreed signals: "Thunderstorm" and "Dortmund".

In total, the grouping of German troops, together with the Romanian and Finnish units, consisted of approximately 4.5 million people, a little less than 400 tanks and 4275 combat aircraft, counting the aircraft of Romania and Finland.

Against them, on the three fronts of the Western theater of operations, an army of 8 million was deployed, built in two strategic echelons and covered by three separate armies of the NKVD.

Only in the border districts, the Germans were opposed by 11 thousand tanks and another 8 thousand in the armies of the second echelon. How many tanks were in the rifle divisions and in the armies of the NKVD, including their own strength, remains unknown.

From the air, this grouping was covered by 11,000 aircraft and 2,300 long-range bombers that were part of the TWO RGK. Another 8,000 combat troops were in reserve.
machines.

The coastal flanks of the fronts relied on the support of powerful and numerous formations of the Navy. The aviation of the fleet (not counting the Pacific) had 6,700 aircraft, more than all the Luftwaffe formations in the east.

Why did Stalin concentrate such a monstrous army on the border?

But this question is so obvious that only former historians of the CPSU with dislocated brains can answer it: "For defense".

Other questions are much more interesting:

How did the Germans, with their frail forces, manage to defeat and destroy all this monstrous force?

Why did official history declare the loss of 1,200 aircraft a disaster when there were 11,000 of them.

Why was the loss of 600 tanks in the first two days of the war also declared a disaster when there were also 11,000 of them?

Where did the gigantic army, aimed at invading Europe after the landing of the Germans on the British Isles, go?

With all the tactical surprise of the strike, they had to be stopped by July 1. The Panzer Groups of Hoth, Guderian and Kleist, who had rushed forward and were ahead of their infantry by two daily marches, would have been cut off from it, surrounded, crushed, crushed and smeared by the terrible superiority in forces that the Red Army had.

And this would certainly have happened, if not for one circumstance.

If the Red Army resisted.

This was the famous mistake in the third sign made by Comrade Stalin, who liked to simplify everything.

In the dead of night on June 22 - at 2:10 am - General Guderian left for his command post, located 15 kilometers northwest of Brest near the town of Bogukaly.

He arrived there at 3:10 am. From 8 o'clock in the evening the tanks of his group, roaring their

gasoline engines, advanced to the border.

Hitler's order was read to the soldiers.

"The hour has come, my soldiers," the Fuhrer addressed the Wehrmacht, "when ... the fate of Europe, the future of Germany and our people are now completely in your hands!"

What about bridges? Guderian asked and was surprised to learn that the Russians had cleared the bridges, clearing passages in many areas for the passage of tanks.

The sky in the east began to turn gray. The day began on June 22, 1941, which fell on a Sunday. Guderian looked at his watch again. It was 3:15 am.

And ordered to begin artillery preparation.

Late in the evening of June 21, when it became clear to everyone that the Germans were moving their troops to the West in some very strange way - pushing them as far as possible to the borders of the USSR - the last peacetime directive signed by Timoshenko and Zhukov was sent from Moscow to the headquarters of the fronts signed by Timoshenko and Zhukov - "not to succumb to any provocative actions that could cause major complications."

When the shooting started at the borders, and the German tanks moved forward, Stalin, "as part of the agreement reached," began to dial Hitler to complain to the Fuhrer about his generals who had taken provocative actions, about the possibility of which Hitler had long warned his friend.

However, it was not so easy to get through to the Fuhrer from Moscow. But Stalin did it with his usual perseverance. All this looked completely mystical, considering that Schulenburg had already handed Molotov a note declaring war drawn up in accordance with all the rules, and in Berlin Ribbentrop made a corresponding statement to Dekanozov, summoned at dawn.

Did Stalin get the impression that the Imperial Minister of Foreign Affairs, together with the Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of Germany, acted on behalf of some commander of a tank division recruited by the British? He continued to call Berlin, and when it became clear that this could not be done by telephone, he used the radio line. In the end, it was possible to contact the Reich Chancellery in Berlin. They instantly appreciated the insanity reigning in the Kremlin and began to fool the great leader, assuring that they did not know anything, that everything would be reported to the Fuhrer, and "of course, if everything is as you report, then the guilty will be severely punished."

From Moscow they demanded to immediately report everything to Hitler personally. But Hitler in the Reich Chancellery could not be found in any way and offered to contact them tomorrow morning, assuring that they "reported to everyone who needs it."

Here Stalin lost his patience, and he decided that these negotiations would be much easier to conduct if there were no German troops on our territory. Therefore, he ordered all fronts to immediately go on the offensive, to drive the Germans out of the territory of the USSR, but not to cross the border until further notice. Therefore, just three and a half hours after the German invasion, the headquarters of the border fronts received the first wartime directive signed by Timoshenko and Zhukov, which prescribed:

"The troops must use all their strength and means to attack the enemy forces and destroy them in areas where they have violated the Soviet border. From now on, until further notice, the ground troops will not cross the border."

By noon on June 22, Stalin, Timoshenko and Zhukov finally realized that the invasion of England was apparently being delayed, since Hitler chose to invade the USSR. And then came the great hour! It was decided to launch Operation Thunderstorm!

"

"Thunderstorm", "Thunderstorm", "Thunderstorm"! - teletypes and transmitters of the People's Commissariat of Defense and the General Staff began to strain on all direct communication lines and radio frequencies. "

"Thunderstorm", "Thunderstorm", "Thunderstorm"! She rustled and thundered on the still surviving communication lines between the front, corps and divisional headquarters.

From hundreds of safes, with a certain amount of ritual solemnity, thick red packages were removed with the inscription "Open on receipt of a signal

"Storm".

Packets of operational orders with the names of Prussian, Polish and Romanian cities and towns were taken out of the opened packages, which were ordered to be taken in the first 72 hours after the start of the operation. On the given secret maps, the fat red arrows aimed rapaciously at Warsaw and Copenhagen, at Berlin and Königsberg, at Bucharest, Budapest and Vienna.

On the North-Western Front, the commander of the tank division, Colonel Ivan Chernyakhovsky, having opened his red envelope, did not hesitate for a minute, threw the tanks into the offensive on Tilsit, with the aim of capturing it, to develop the offensive on Königsberg, as was indicated in the order extracted from the package. Even under the conditions of June 22, 1941, Chernyakhovsky's tanks managed to advance 25 kilometers by crushing German positions. Only the general situation at the front forced Chernyakhovsky to turn back.

On the Western Front, the Panzer Division of the 14th Mechanized Corps, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Sergei Mednikov, crossed the Bug at the same time as the German tanks, but in the other direction, and launched an attack on Deblin, as ordered by the opened red packet. The division moved forward 30 kilometers and stopped, having used up fuel and ammunition. Lieutenant Colonel Mednikov died. On the Southern Front, several divisions invaded Romanian territory, supported by the fire of the monitors of the Danube Flotilla.

But these were exceptions to the general situation that prevailed on the fronts at the moment when the order was given to start Operation Thunderstorm. Exceptions that don't prove the rule at all.

A few minutes after the start of artillery preparation at the border, Army General Kirill Meretskov was arrested in the fast train "Red Arrow", plying along the Moscow-Leningrad route and back, and transferred to the Sukhanov prison. In Moscow, everyone believed that he became the commander-in-chief of the North-West direction as part of two fronts - the North-West and the North. The fronts, which had already extracted packages with the Thunderstorm from the safes, were ordered to capture East Prussia in the first stage, in the second - the remnants of Finland and Norway and be ready to occupy Sweden. Unfortunately, Chernyakhovsky alone failed to do this ...

Delivered to the Sukhanovskaya prison, General of the Army Kirill Meretskov, who had already been in the clutches of the NKVD in 1937, thought of only one thing: how to quickly deserve a bullet in the back of the head, while avoiding torture and torment. This could be achieved, as he knew from experience, only by telling the interrogators everything they wanted to hear from him. He did not take into account only one thing, that he had experience three years ago, which was somewhat outdated.

By this time, the entire investigative team was already very tired with what could be called "the indefatigable general pride." I had to spend too much time to show the arrested generals that they were not generals at all, but shit, as Lenin liked to say about the entire Russian intelligentsia.

In order for the generals to understand this quickly, a kind of preliminary ritual was developed to "humble their pride" even before the first interrogation.

With Meretskov, as expected, they lovingly cut off the buttonholes with the five stars of the general of the army, unscrewed the orders, tore off the chrome boots, cut off the buttons on the trousers, took away the belt and belt, photographed in front and profile, and then, without asking a single question, began to beat rubber clubs. Further, the entire investigative team urinated on the head of General Armshya, who was lying in blood on the floor, and left him to lie in the investigator's urine until the morning.

The fact is that Comrade Stalin personally expressed a desire to take part in the first interrogation of the former chief of the General Staff of the Red Army. We have already mentioned that despite the presence of a huge number of paintings by famous Soviet artists such as "Comrade Stalin at the maneuvers of the Belarusian Military District", the leader did not like and did not go to maneuvers and training grounds, but he went to the dungeons of the NKVD, and with great pleasure. Especially before the war.

Unfortunately, the events of June 22 somewhat changed the plans of Comrade Stalin, and therefore the investigators, without waiting for their beloved leader, were instructed to work independently "according to the investigation plan."

Despite the preliminary processing, or perhaps thanks to it, Meretskov immediately began to testify, and confronted Stern, ignoring the hysterical cries of the latter: "Kirill Afanasyevich, well, it didn't happen, it didn't happen, it didn't happen!", Meretskov testified that he was involved, along with Stern, in a criminal group that worked for German and British intelligence at the same time. That the group periodically transferred abroad the most secret documents regarding the plans and weapons of the Red Army.

When asked who led the criminal group, Meretskov replied that he did not know. But it was difficult for the general of the army to pass himself off as an ordinary saboteur who did not know who was directing his actions. They immediately started beating him with rubber truncheons, fists and boots for new testimony. NKVD investigator Semyonov later recalled: "I personally saw how Meretskov and Loktionov were brutally beaten during the investigation. They didn't just moan, but simply roared in pain ... they acted especially brutally with Stern. There was no place left on it. At each interrogation, he lost consciousness several times ... Loktionov was severely beaten, covered in blood, his appearance also affected Meretskov, who denounced him. Loktionov refused, and Vlodzimirsky, Shvartsman and Rhodes continued to beat him in turn and together in front of Meretskov, who urged Loktionov to sign everything they wanted from him. Loktionov roared in pain, rolled on the floor, but did not agree ...".

Meretskov, writhing in pain, named his accomplices. He named Zhukov himself first, then Pavlov, Kirponos, Klenov and many others. Only the new commander of the North-Western Front, Colonel-General Fyodor Kuznetsov, is missing from his testimony. Oddly enough, he alone survived, although his chief of staff, Lieutenant General Klenov, was arrested and

died during interrogation from a heart attack, and the front itself was defeated even worse than the Western one. General Pavlov was shot along with his entire staff. It is generally accepted that for the defeat and collapse of the Western Front. It is no longer possible to determine what exactly. In Kyiv, General of the Army Kirponos was shot dead by a special officer, according to the official version, he committed suicide (two shots from a revolver in the back of the head). Zhukov survived, but all his employees, from the chief of staff, General Telegin, to the driver Bochin, were arrested...

Meretskov continued to be dragged to confrontations. He exposed Smushkevich. He also testified against Rychagov. The famous fighter pilot, apparently, had already lost his mind by this time, because he began to behave extremely defiantly and even allowed himself verbal insults against the investigator Rhodes. This forced the latter to carry out his long-standing threat and arrest Rychagov's wife, Aviation Major Maria Nesterenko, who was captured right in the unit on June 24th. The motivation for the arrest was as follows: "... being Rychagov's beloved wife, she could not help but know about her husband's traitorous activities."

Nesterenko was a renowned pilot who repeatedly demonstrated extraordinary courage in the sky and a rare skill in flying an aircraft.

"The same courage," writes Arkady Vaksberg, who specially studied her fate, "

she showed herself in the torture chamber, saving both herself and her husband from slanderous accusations... I am unable to describe the tortures to which this wonderful woman was subjected. I don't even have the courage to do that..."

I also do not have the heart to describe how this woman was tortured. It is quite well known what was done to women in the dungeons of the NKVD. I can only say that the illustrious pilot, Major Maria Nesterenko, did not confess to anything, did not sign a single protocol, and in October 1941 she was shot with her husband.

(Not all Kremlin "miracles" have a real explanation. In September 1941, Stalin unexpectedly ordered the release of Meretskov, Vannikov, Batov and several others. All the rest, including Proskurov, Rychagov with his wife, Smushkevich, Loktionov, Savchenko, Sakrier, Stern, Zasesov, Volodin, Sklizkov, Arzheuhin, Kayukov, Sobornov, Taubin, Rozov, Rozov-Egorov, Bulatov and Fibikh were shot. Philip Goloshchekin, the "regicide", also got into this company. In parallel, there were executions in Saratov and Orel.

Investigator Vasily Ivanov recalled: "Being in Kharkov in September 1941, I learned with great surprise that Meretskov had been appointed commander of the front troops. And I knew from interrogations with my participation what evidence he gave - that he was in a spy group and was preparing a military coup against Stalin.

Dressed right in prison in a new uniform, Meretskov appeared on the same day before Comrade Stalin. The leader sympathetically remarked to Meretskov that he did not look well and inquired about his health. And then he sent to command the front. Vannikov was appointed People's Commissar of Ammunition. After that, is it possible to doubt that Stalin was a great man!) While the investigators were horrified by the abyss of another military-counterrevolutionary conspiracy that opened before them, the events at the front began to take the form of an unprecedented military catastrophe in history, after which, with increasing watched in horror from the Kremlin. The huge Western Front was falling apart before our eyes.

The resistance of individual outposts, units and garrisons could not hide from the command the absolutely incredible behavior of the army. The history of wars has not yet known such a thing.

One and a half million people went over to the Germans with weapons in their hands. Some, in whole formations, to the sounds of divisional orchestras.

Two million people surrendered, throwing down their weapons. (The word "weapon" means not only a rifle or a pistol, but everything up to and including a tank and an aircraft.) 500,000 people were captured under various circumstances.

1 million people frankly deserted (of which 657,354 people were caught, 10,200 were shot, the rest disappeared without a trace).

800 thousand people were killed and wounded.

Approximately a million people scattered through the forests.

The remaining (from almost 8 million) 980 thousand rolled back east in a panic.

This was the situation in September 1941.

And this is precisely the biggest secret of the military catastrophe of 1941.

Entire regiments, divisions and even corps disappeared without a trace in the whirlwind of an unprecedented whirlpool. Entire squadrons went missing.

20 generals and 182432 officers of various ranks went missing. 106 generals, including several army commanders, were captured.

Almost unopposed, German troops occupied city after city, where monuments to Lenin and Stalin flew from pedestals. A significant part of the population rejoiced, meeting the Germans with flowers, bread and salt. They rejoiced, but, as it soon turned out, completely in vain.

The Germans did not bring liberation. They brought new slavery and terror, presented with much greater frankness. The German command was stunned.

The commanders quickly appreciated all the incredible benefits of the situation. They already had a million-strong Russian national army at their disposal, ready to fight the regime. Another two million people were potentially ready to join its ranks. It was considered very likely that, if this army were officially recognized, the remnants of the Red Army, scattered over the area and retreating in panic, would join it. This army would quickly liberate the country from the Stalinist regime. The commanders of the army groups immediately reported this to Berlin, awaiting the Fuehrer's decision.

Hitler, who spent the whole week from July 19 to 25 on injections, at the end of July was cheerful, cheerful and excited.

He sent an "Explanation" to the commanders, where he pointed out to the idealist generals that "we are not freeing Russia from anything and from no one. We are conquering it ... We do not need any Russian national army and are not going to form any Russian government ... The Russian people are of interest to us only as a labor force that will work for the German nation in the future.

Die, you can't say it better! Hitler again confirmed the "magnificent" insight, missing, perhaps, the last chance to get out alive from this whole story.

Those who went over to the side of the Wehrmacht with weapons in their hands were ordered to disarm and declare prisoners of war. Some made their way back to the Red Army and were, of course, shot. Some, at their own peril and risk, the Germans kept, distributing them among the units of the Wehrmacht. (These events took place from June to approximately September 1941. In February 1942, a special commission from Germany was counting the Russians who served among the Germans in various units of the Wehrmacht. And they counted

such 1 million 100 thousand. All this happened long before the appearance of General Vlasov. As you know, Hitler allowed the formation of the 1st division of the so-called "Vlasov Army" only in December 1944).

The ferocious occupation regime established by the Germans in the occupied territories, the mass executions of civilians for the purpose of intimidation, the openly declared intention to turn all Russians without exception into working cattle, and much more hit the most sensitive strings of Russian patriotism.

Official propaganda immediately took advantage of this, replacing almost all of its pre-war slogans with national-patriotic ones and declaring the Patriotic War itself. By the autumn of 1941, all the signs of an incipient people's war were already visible on the territory of the USSR, and no one had ever managed to win a war against the people. But this did not change the anti-people and bestial nature of the Stalinist regime in the slightest.

If the German command was stunned by the events of the summer of 1941, then you can imagine how stunned Comrade Stalin and "his great marshals" were.

Being in full confidence that the educational measures with the Russian people carried out since 1917, the main of which was the constantly ongoing mass extermination of this people, finally turned it into a brainwashed, wordless mass, suitable only for grinding into camp, and now trench dust, comrade Stalin was shocked by the surprise that his beloved army gave him.

The perverted psychology cultivated in the communist anti-world made the leader himself believe that the Red Army soldiers and commanders (among whom there is practically no person who has not been shot, tortured, dispossessed, exiled, arrested, or one of his relatives, friends disappeared without a trace or friends) have so lost all normal human feelings and emotions, have mutated so much on the terrible path from an ordinary person to a Soviet person that they no longer have any other desires than to go on a campaign to win world domination for the criminal regime.

To the great honor of the Russian people, it must be said that this did not happen. The events of the summer of 1941 can, without any exaggeration, be called a spontaneous uprising of the army against the Stalinist despotism.

The totalitarian regime in general, and the communist regime in particular, turns the country into one huge organized criminal group, where, along with unthinkable bloody crimes against their own people, there is a process of drawing the people themselves into the crimes of the regime with collective responsibility for these crimes.

This creates a powerful mutual responsibility, cemented by blood and lies, as it should be in any organized criminal group.

Nowhere in the world and never in world history has this been demonstrated more clearly than in the powerful criminal gang that the former Russia has become thanks to two great godfathers - Lenin and Stalin. Their calculation was theoretically almost flawless: the rest of the world would never be able to organize and arm itself in such a way as to resist their grand schemes of turning the whole Earth into a huge criminal zone.

But the great godfathers, due to their own limitations and illiteracy, not only did not see the patterns that govern world progress, they did not understand the processes uncontrollably developing in that primitive criminal system that they built on the bones of tens of millions of destroyed Russian people, intending to do good to it all mankind.

This is the process of self-liquidation embedded in the totalitarian system itself. This process is very interesting and deserves careful study.

Stalin clearly intended to start his campaign in Europe as early as 1938. However, as the cherished hour approached, the process of ruthless destruction of our own armed forces, the state apparatus, industry and, of course, the people began.

Let us assume for a moment that in the summer of 1941 everything happened as Comrade Stalin had planned. On June 19, Hitler would begin to withdraw troops from the Soviet border and, say, in late July - early August, invaded the British Isles, leaving the unprotected rear and his fate to the discretion of Comrade Stalin. What would happen then?

The process of self-liquidation was already in full swing, gaining momentum. On June 22, General of the Army Meretskov had already been arrested, and the orgy of arrests in the army and industry that began in the USSR after the arrest of General Ivan Proskurov in July 1940 was still far from over. One can easily foresee what would happen next.

Tymoshenko, Zhukov, Pavlov and Kirponos were next under the knife, not to mention dozens and hundreds of generals and lower-ranking officers. Would we not have bled so much by August that we would again be unable to move an arm or a leg?

A huge abscess matured and swelled on the body of the country, feverish it and threatening a general infection of the blood with all the ensuing consequences. Hitler, having opened this abscess with his bayonet, without realizing it, rendered a great service to Comrade Stalin and his regime, extending their existence for years, which they actually did not have.

When, after the war, having got his hands on nuclear and hydrogen weapons, Stalin, having unleashed a war in Korea, again began feverishly preparing his 8-million-strong army for a campaign, the parallel process of self-liquidation that began this time destroyed him, his entire punitive and slave-owning apparatus and eventually the Soviet Union. So errors in the third sign, gradually accumulating, destroyed the leader himself and his empire.

But back to 1941. Stalin was perhaps one of the first to appreciate Hitler's gift. The fact that his almost 9 million army ceased to exist, having evaporated like a drop of dew under the rays of the sun, shocked him, but not so much as to completely lose his head. He quickly saw what opportunities Hitler's incredible stupidity and racial insanity offered him.

In August, Stalin made a landmark statement, the meaning of which became clear much later. "We have no prisoners of war," the leader said, "we have traitors to the Motherland." (It would be more honest to say "traitors to the party, government and the NKVD!"). He had every reason to make such a statement. In the hands of the Germans by this time were 4.2 million prisoners of war of the Red Army, including Stalin's own son, Yakov Dzhugashvili.

Then Stalin gives order No. 220 (not to be confused with the later order No. 227 "Not a step back!"), where, without any "new talk", in simple and understandable language, all military personnel at the front are informed that their families in the rear are becoming hostages their conduct at the front. In case of surrender, the families will be repressed. The servicemen themselves will be shot at one suspicion of unwillingness to fight. Can you imagine how these servicemen would have behaved if the Russian National Liberation Army had been created by that time?

Then Stalin announces total mobilization, starting to form the so-called "people's militia" divisions, throwing under the German tanks completely untrained contingents, consisting mainly of elderly and sick people, not covered

"Mobilization Plan-41". The leader no longer trusts his army!

Catapulted by Hitler into an alliance with the "great democracies", Stalin asks the British and Americans to send their troops to the Soviet-German front to replace the unreliable units of the Red Army. He tearfully humiliates himself before those whom only yesterday he despised and hated. Meanwhile, on our side of the front, a ferocious police-terrorist regime reigns no better than on the side where the Nazi army is in charge. Meanwhile, the still unprecedented military flywheel, launched in February 1941 by the Mobilization Plan-41, continues to unwind.

By the beginning of 1942, another 420 rifle, 120 cavalry divisions, 250 tank brigades, hundreds of artillery and aviation regiments were being formed. Untrained, they rush into the meat grinder of war, exterminating almost without exception.

As the war becomes more and more Patriotic, Stalin, having restored his former confidence, and with it his contempt for his country and its "population", does not forget to bestow this population with his new favors.

After the victory at Stalingrad, he gives the people the death penalty by hanging and hard labor.

After the victory at the Kursk Bulge, all Kalmyks are sent to the regions of the Far North.

After Operation Citadel, all Tatars are deported from Crimea to Northern Kazakhstan within 24 hours.

After crossing the old Soviet border - Chechens and Ingush.

The plans for the total resettlement of all Balts, Poles, Germans, Romanians, Hungarians, Czechs and even Ukrainians with Jews are almost ready. Operation Thunderstorm continues!

The capture of Eastern Europe leads to the temptation to finish what was planned before the war.

"Sovietization" of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Albania, Yugoslavia, parts of Germany, Korea, China was carried out , parts of Vietnam.

To do this, another 30 million Russian people had to be destroyed, but this, as always, worried the leader very little. "During collectivization, we lost more," he dismissed Churchill when he tried to come out with condolences about such monstrous losses of the USSR. One more effort - and a bright dream will come true!

Everything was clearly moving towards this. However, on the line of confrontation is no longer a beggarly Wehrmacht, but a huge American army armed with nuclear weapons, aviation and navy of unprecedented power.

But the obsession is stronger!

The clear intention of the leader who has fallen into madness to unleash a nuclear war horrifies his accomplices. The aging leader, without a moment's hesitation, as befits the old "godfather", decides to liquidate them.

All: Molotov, Voroshilov, Zhukov, Beria, Kaganovich and Malenkov. Everyone who has not yet died a natural death, like Zhdanov and Shcherbakov.

In the metastases of the process of self-destruction, the leader himself and most of his accomplices perish.

They are dying, but Operation Thunderstorm remains! It takes on new forms, repeatedly bringing the world to the brink of a thermonuclear catastrophe. Again, millions of soldiers and tens of thousands of tanks vibrate on the line of confrontation, where any spark can at any moment grow into a new world fire.

The red arrows of the "Thunderstorm" reach out to Cuba, Ethiopia, Yemen, Angola, Cambodia and Vietnam, everywhere leaving millions of dead, starved to death, rotting in the camps. But again begins to pick up speed, unnoticed due to an error in the third sign, the process of self-destruction. It turns out that the militarization of the country can continue up to a certain limit. Having famously skipped this limit, the Stalinist empire collapses, crumbles, and its fragments, rapidly flying forward, Time sweeps to the sidelines of history.

On August 30 and 31, 1994, the former Soviet, and now Russian troops finally left the territories of Germany and the Baltic states. Russian President Boris Yeltsin and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl did everything possible to give this event at least some solemnity. It was sad, because an entire era was leaving in the past. Exactly 55 years after its start, Operation Thunderstorm ended. Is it forever?

St. Petersburg, spring-summer, 1993; summer 1997